

Science and Mathematics Education Centre

**Educators Engaged in Meaning-Making About Their Work:
Using an Expanding Circles Model of Governance, Grounded in
Sociocratic Principles, to Improve the Work Educators Do**

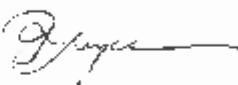
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Doctor of Philosophy
of
Curtin University**

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

Signature: 
Date: 5/04/11

Abstract

The early part of the 21st century saw a dramatic shift in Western cultures away from representative democracy to a more participatory or deep democracy. Advocates of this *new* democracy consider that finding solutions to the problems that confront our world, on a global scale, are too complex to be left in the hands of elected officials. As a result, public participation, or community engagement, has become a way for organisations to dig deeper in order to find more resilient and sustainable solutions to difficult problems. This form of democracy presupposes informed citizens who are communicatively competent to take their place as fully participating members of a democratic society. As schools are considered by some experts to be the best place to develop the skills required for democratic participation it made me question the reality of making such a claim. Overwhelmingly, schools continue to function under endowed, autocratic leadership where there is little opportunity for democratic participation.

In undertaking my research I took on the role of co-participant in two primary schools to explore the question: *What happens when teachers are given greater opportunities to deliberate and make decisions about the work they do?* How and why it happened became the focus of an auto-ethnographic study with co-participants from the two schools over a period of two and a half years (2008-2010). As the researcher, I coached, mentored and guided individual teachers, principals, teams of teachers and leadership teams through a restructuring and reculturing process that began with the introduction of a new governance model, sociocracy, where decisions are made by the *socios*, people in close social proximity to one another, rather than the *demos*, the general populace. The complex and emerging nature of this research determined that I use a multi paradigmatic design, as espoused by Guba (1990), in order to respond to the turbulent nature of the research field. My design allowed me to continually shift focus to reveal multiple perspectives, my own and “Other”, as I mined the rich underlay of data that emerged out of my interactions in each school. The quality standards used to measure the worth of this project are aligned to the methodologies chosen; they shift throughout the project as I consciously choose the best way to reveal the knowledge gained from my interactions in the field. I have

interwoven theory, practice and multiple voices throughout the text as a way of balancing the reported disconnect that teachers feel between policy and practice.

The outcome of this research is a holistic, scalable organisational framework for schools to use as a way of creating resilient learning organisations that adapt and improve in a constant state of be(com)ing.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to the principals and teachers who invited me into their schools and took part in this journey with me as we tried to make sense of the emerging possibilities. Very special thanks must go to the assistant principals in my host schools who were most affected by the changes I proposed and most challenged by a need to re-vision what leadership might be for them in a different kind of space. Each assistant principal demonstrated what a vital part they play in a school as they balance the role of leader with classroom practitioner. It is a position that remains largely unexplored for the possibilities and opportunities that could be revealed.

To my son, Rob, who didn't baulk when I gave up work to become a full time student again; thanks for your ongoing support and love. To Rikki, who reluctantly joined me on that first Camino in Spain, but couldn't stop herself from wholeheartedly embracing the journey. Your encouragement and belief in me has been such a joy. And to my eldest daughter, Georgia - thanks for teaching me the power of resilience and reminding me that we can't do hard things on our own. In your words, the journey of this PhD has been "character building"!

To Phil, who has always believed in me and who, as the ultimate social networker, could have cured cancer before Kevin Bacon¹.

What on Earth would I have done without Kate! The crazy breakfast debates, where we explored exciting ways of looking at the world of education, could have been overheard by others as the most vigorous of arguments. Kate kept me connected to the real world of teaching and the oftentimes devastating effect of *big P* policy on the passions and beliefs that teachers have about their work. Kate, I couldn't have made it without you. Now that this is over you might just make it to work on time!

To Peter Taylor, my supervisor, who gave me so much rope I got horribly tangled up in it so many times I thought I'd never break free. I had, over time, become crushed by the educational machine, and yet Peter still seemed to think I had something important to say. I discovered my voice under his subtle tutorage, a voice that I had literally lost through the damaging effects of a disconnected life world.

¹ Future Makers - How Kevin Bacon Cured Cancer
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/documentaries/interactive/futuremakers/ep4/> - 10 Mar 2008

Finally, I owe both the opening and closing moments of this thesis to two people; Amir and David. I'll get to David in a moment, but first to Amir, a visiting student from Pakistan, who arrived at SMEC (Science & Mathematics Education Centre) mid-way through 2009 with the endearing propensity of *cutting to the chase*. One day, as I sat eating my lunch, he pulled up a chair, looked me straight in the eye and said,

So, Paula, why is it you are so old and only now doing this PhD?

His question made me laugh out loud as I replied,

Well, Amir, that's the whole reason for this PhD I'm doing. Why, indeed, am I so old and only now finding my voice? Why did I finally have to leave the profession I claimed to be passionate about to have a say about my work? How is it that I now have the ear of leaders in education who in the past had told me my ideas didn't matter? Ahhhh! Amir, I'm doing my PhD now because I finally found my voice and I can't be shut down.

This thesis exists because I finally became too old and disillusioned about education to be told what to do any more so I left the classroom to become a learner. This thesis exists as a challenge to leaders, at whatever level they operate, to find ways to keep the best teachers doing the work of teaching. It challenges leaders to let passionate voices speak and be heard no matter what their age and no matter what they may be saying; who knows, some of it just might make sense. This thesis is a guide for schools to recognise that, despite the inevitable policy merry-go-round and political mosh-pit that drag schools lurching from one philosophical viewpoint and associated degree of accountability to another, individual teachers and schools have a strong source of residual power over their own destiny to do what they believe is the very best to improve the educational opportunities for all.

This thesis is both a political act of high treason (Pinar, 2004) and a call for teachers to take action in line with their beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning, and to create policy-in-action on the ground (Denzin, 2010).

And so to David, a principal and courageous leader in one of my host schools, he could see that something needed to be done and set a steady course to do it. He took

on the change challenge and trusted me, his leadership team and his teachers to see it through. If the journey of this thesis has taught me nothing else it has revealed the absolute and irrefutable belief that the possibilities for real and sustainable educational change lie with leaders. Schools can have all the structures and strategies in place, all the professional development, all the checks and balances, the latest technology, the best of resources and the wildest ambitions, but without courageous leadership nothing will change. Our schools will continue to lurch from one externally imposed condition to another unless leaders take a firm hand on the tiller and steer a charted course to the uncertain future that we know is already upon us. We need leaders who can clearly determine and articulate a common purpose and vision for their school and identify the individual capabilities that are needed to achieve success. We need leaders who can communicate aspirational goals and never waiver from them when the going gets tough.

Our children deserve better than what we currently present as education and our passionate and creative teachers deserve to be heard above the cries of mediocrity and sameness that keeps education chained to an outmoded industrial model.

Principals and other endowed leaders in schools have a responsibility to challenge the status quo and not only ask what are we going to do and how are we going to do it but who is ready to step into the space they create where genuine transformational change can occur?

Thanks, David, for giving it a go.

Glossary of terms used in the text

Term	Definition
AP or DP	Assistant Principal; a.k.a Deputy Principal in some systems
Learning Hub	The Learning Hub is a place for leaders to learn how to lead, to nurture each other and to determine the best course of action to steer the school in the desired direction.
Learning Pod	Learning Pods are fluid learning spaces where groups of people mobilise around ideas and do the work of moving the organisation in the desired direction. Learning Hub members lead the pods.
Pub Hub	An alternative to the Learning Hub held by consent according to the needs of people who want to learn to lead.
RAISe	The Raising Achievement in Schools initiative was designed to address these concerns within Western Australia's Catholic Education sector concerning students struggling with basic literacy and numeracy skills. The initiative claimed to facilitate professional development for teachers to help them meet the needs of all students. The initiative commenced in 2004 with an intake of 20 schools and continued for approximately 5 years.
Sociocracy	A dynamic governance structure where decisions are made and policy is created, at the level where participants are ultimately held accountable. See Appendix A for a comprehensive overview of sociocratic philosophy.
Open Space	Open Space is a dynamic, self organising meeting format where participants generate their own agenda around the themes of passion and responsibility. More information can be found at http://www.openspaceworld.com/
Book of Proceedings	Each Open Space event generates a book of proceedings which captures the entire event and is contributed to by all participants. The facilitator compiles the book and sends it out to the participating organisation immediately after the event. The book contains the data that was generated on the day and is a way of holding the organisation accountable to the dialogue and agreements that were made. All participants receive a copy.
Opening round	In sociocratic meetings the opening round begins the meeting. It is a time to check in and be accountable to participate.

Closing round	The closing round in a sociocratic meeting is the evaluative round where each participant evaluates how the group is going and how they are contributing to the decisions. The closing round keeps the group focussed on the purpose of each meeting.
Non Violent Communication	Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is based on the principles of nonviolence-- the natural state of compassion when no violence is present in the heart. It is used to practice empathy and understanding in communication. More information can be found at http://www.cnvc.org/

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Overview

This thesis is a snapshot of organisational life in two primary schools, captured over a period of two and a half years, as they set about reculturing and restructuring to improve the way they worked. As the researcher my role was to facilitate, mentor and coach my co-participants through that change. The picture I describe to you here is framed by my unfinished epistemic and ontological understanding of a life-world that continues to evolve as I evolve as a facilitator of change. The picture is incomplete. For every voice you will hear in this text, there are a dozen more you will not hear. For every act I describe there are a dozen more acts that have not made it into this story; because that is the nature of a complex life-world. I attempt to create a linear representation of what happened during my time as a researcher but in reality it didn't happen like that; it didn't neatly unfold, it exploded! It was messy and unpredictable, full of false starts, questions raised, dilemmas wrestled with and relationships *fraught*, and as I tell it here the story continues to emerge on many levels, at many sites, involving many different people. The practice of my research and the methodology which underpins it mirror each other, behaving as a reflection of the world they represent – an emergent, ever evolving world. Here is an overview of what you will find in this text. It is, however, just one version of what happened...

Background

Towards the end of 2007, the notion of undertaking a PhD began to take shape within a space where many different things were happening to me all at once and they converged, quite by chance, around the idea of governance. I knew I wanted to improve the way teachers engaged together in schools but how could I do that when so many past initiatives had failed to create real learning communities despite the belief that each one would be *the one*. As a curriculum leader, I had put many hours into trying to engage teachers in professional learning, but without much success, so I knew my project had to look at what we did together through different eyes. I needed to see something that hadn't been seen before; at least not in the same combination of elements, but what that might be remained a mystery.

I undertook facilitator training through the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) in 2007 and it opened my eyes to seeing how teachers could engage better together if they had the necessary confidence and skills to lead each other. But there still seemed to be a gap that I didn't know how to fill. It was then that I stumbled upon sociocracy, a governance structure and process that seemed to promise something different. It made me think about how we hold meetings in schools and how they are an element of organisational life that seem not to have been considered despite the fact that everyone agrees they are a waste of time. I thought back to the hundreds of meetings I had attended where action was rarely agreed to, where frustration at a lack of opportunity for dialogue defined them, and I felt a new possibility reveal itself. I thought of what had driven the action we *did* take in schools, with the realisation that we mostly saw policy as an impost on us; it seemingly came out of nowhere and knocked us off our feet. Perhaps, then, if we looked at the structure of organisations and how decisions are made we could reveal something different about creating learning organisations. Perhaps if we had a place to deconstruct external policy that put conditions on the way we did our work we might become empowered to influence it rather than be immobilized by it.

My research problem, therefore, arose out of my desire to explore the re-imagining of democratic citizenship and participation in schools at the organisational level, and led to the following research problem and questions.

Research problem and questions

My research topic began as - *Educators engaged in meaning-making about their work: Using deep dialogue and a sustainable system of governance to improve the work educators do* – and led to me consider the problem - *What happens when teachers are given the opportunity to engage in deep dialogue about their work and their practice within a sociocratic structure and process of governance?* That led me to ask the questions:

- Do teachers have the capacity to lead their peers?
- Who steps up to lead?
- Where does the *real* power lie in schools?
- Do teachers want to engage in deep dialogue about their work?

- Does sociocracy provide a sustainable way for schools to engage in decision-making?
- What emerges?
- How do we respond?
- How important is endowed leadership in embracing transformative change?
- Can educators become advocates of change and influence policy

As my immersion into the field took me from theorising my research to *doing* it the questions about emergence and how to respond become the flint that ignited many more questions and led to the eventual development of a framework for school improvement and a reframing of my topic to: *Educators Engaged in Meaning Making About Their Work: Using an Expanding Circles Model of Governance, grounded in Sociocratic Principles, to Improve the Work Educators Do*. The framework described in Chapter 11 was the result of pursuing answers to the questions that confronted me each day as my co-participants and I went about introducing the Sociocratic governance structure:

- How can teacher leaders develop the capacity to lead their oftentimes resistant peers?
- How can we track improvement and frame it within the context of whole school development?
- How can we acknowledge and celebrate the custodians and champions of improvement?
- What kind of leadership emerges in a sociocratic school?
- How can we stop the organisation from reverting to business as usual?
- What are the essentials in transformative leadership? Can it be taught?

These and many more questions challenged me throughout my time At Beachlands and Forrester. The questions continued beyond the completion of this project in a way that exemplifies my philosophy of learning described below. In a different environment, described in the Coda at the end of this thesis, I continue to ask how we can develop communicatively competent citizens who can help realise a democratic

society, forged through participation so that we may realise our greatest potential as human beings (Fullan, 2007).

My philosophy: A look inside the black box to see how Paula thinks

“I do not understand one thing in this world, not one.”

(Gilead, Robinson, 2004, p. 187)

As a researcher, certain guiding principles determine how I see the world and act in it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In my world, there is very little that I know for certain; that I'd count on absolutely, but one thing that I am certain about is that when I was teaching, I didn't know much of anything. I thought I was a constructivist teacher, student centred and inclusive. I



Figure One - Xnew=k.old.

thought I spoke *the truth* when I said how I thought things should be. I believed I had a pedagogical grounding for all my work but, can you believe it, after 33 years of teaching I had never heard of Paulo Freire! I thought being critical was the same as criticizing. I considered myself a forward-thinking, early-adopter of change. There was a learner lurking within me but, like Leo the Late Bloomer, I needed the right conditions to step outside what I believed to be true about myself and the world to really begin to learn (Kraus, 1994).

The manner in which schools go about determining their purpose and doing their work has always been a puzzle to me. My entire teaching career has been driven by having to find fragmented solutions, *the* solution, to educational problems; finding the perfect maths book, the perfect way to teach spelling, the perfect staff-room roster, the perfect assessment tool. Finding a perfect solution was, for me, like stuffing down a bar of chocolate; instant gratification followed shortly afterwards by a gnawing feeling of hunger as the sugar hit wore off and back I'd go for something else to appease my appetite. In schools we don't look back at the value of those seemingly perfect solutions, or assess what we might learn from the experience. Instead, we seek the next perfect solution, leaving the wrapper and the experience flapping about in the school yard. A sense of disquiet, a tacit knowing that something isn't quite right, is suppressed by the need to move on. The opportunities offered by disequilibrium ignored.

My project has arisen out of my beliefs about the world and how I make sense of it. It is an invitation for schools to seek new possibilities rather than short-term,

fragmented solutions to perceived problems; to freeze the jump from one stepping-stone to another across the pond and, instead, to become objects *in* the pond; to see everything: the basketball court, the computers, the students, the spelling program, the teachers - everyone and everything - as interacting elements of a dynamic and emergent whole (Mason, 2008). It is a call for schools to stop seeing emergence as problematic but to view it as a natural occurrence when a complex system is healthy and functioning interdependently. People, like me, who embrace this view of what a school is, are actors in their own destiny, engaging together in dialogue to determine the purpose and focus of the school; determining together what action needs to be taken to keep the system healthy. Everyone in this dynamic environment is called on to live out the democratic ideal of a citizen who participates fully in the life of the community; the pond that is ecologically and socially bound together by shared values and a clear purpose, creating policy from the ground up. My way of knowing generates solutions to problems as they emerge (Torrence, 2008). This is the way I see the world.

Purpose and significance

The purpose of this research project is to explore the use of a sociocratic governance model as a way to reimagining decision making in schools and to improve the processes once we know more about them. The aim is to assist schools in developing processes and strategies that harness the wisdom that already resides within their domains, and to reveal to educators the capacity they already have to influence educational decisions at every level (Ozga, 2000). My research is significant in that a holistic model of interacting elements has been developed that is already assisting schools in undertaking the difficult process of change and improvement.

Theoretical approach

Initially, I intended my research to be a conversation starter, between and with educators, centred on the nature of schools and schooling in the 21st century, and an exploration into the work teachers do and the decisions that were made about that work (Knowles & Cole, 2008). I wanted meetings to become places where beliefs could be revealed and explored, where educators could discover their voices and let

go of known ways of doing things that had lost their meaning but continued to exist just because of tradition. I wanted educators to see how they could influence external policy by creating policy on the ground. My theoretical approach, therefore is a critical auto-ethnography; an interpretation of my way of knowing in relationship with my co-participants as an endogenous, autopoietic process of continual renewal and self-organisation both as individuals and at the organisational level (Mason, 2008). By design, my research is an epistemic rollercoaster ride into the dynamic, interrelated and ecological world of complexity theory; the disorder and confusion of chaos; the dialogue and mutual respect generated by democratic theory; the interactions and connections of network theory; and the political, spiritual and transformative power of an Integral worldview (Taylor, Settellaier & Luitel, in press/2011). A postmodern inspired critical turn allows me to write as a method of inquiry and to deconstruct assumptions about the way decisions are made in schools. It questions where power resides with a view towards emancipation (Lather, 1990).

Each of these significant referents and paradigms, explored in depth later in Chapter 4, turned the spotlight on different aspects of my research and helped construct a social Holon² comprising both dependent and interdependent elements. And so, I enter the research field full of hope, full of excitement, and full of trepidation...it is vital that I also take with me a pedagogy of hope (Denzin, 2007).

Description of the project

The future is not to be forecast, but created. What we do today will decide the shape of things tomorrow. Especially the way we perceive the challenges that await us, and the vision we develop for coping with them.

(Laszlo, 2006)

I look back on my research and write this section from the position of co-creator of the project as it evolved. Over a period of two and a half years I worked with two primary schools in metropolitan Perth to introduce a sociocratic governance model into each school. The project was introduced into each school with intervals of around 6 months between them so that learning gained from one site could be used to

² A **holon** (Greek: *holos*, "whole") is something that is simultaneously a whole and a part. The word was coined by Arthur Koestler in his book *The Ghost in the Machine* (1967, p. 48).

improve the way subsequent decisions were made about the project's implementation, not only across sites but within individual sites.

Site 1: Beachlands Primary School³

At Beachlands I began by introducing the staff to the project in a half hour spot in the regular staff meeting. I then did initial videoed interviews with 10 volunteer participants. I coached the leadership team in the principles of sociocracy and then introduced the meeting structure into the general staff meeting. The Learning Hub was created and from there the staff meeting structure was changed to reflect the desire of the staff to work in smaller groups, now branded Pods. Data were gathered throughout the process via conversations, reflections, journaling and further interviews over a period of two and a half years. Volunteers from all teaching staff, the principal and, eventually, both assistant principals were part of the project. Staff that did not elect to be part of the project (in that they did not consent to be interviewed) were, never-the-less, involved in it as the initiative affected all staff. Some teachers consented to be included once they felt comfortable with the process, others who did not are, by necessity, unrepresented here.

Site 2: Forrester Primary School

At Forrester, I began the process by working with the extended leadership team⁴ in discussions, and subsequent coaching, about change and reform in education. Initially, participants at Forrester were the extended leadership team, who were later joined by Learning Hub members, making a group of 10 participants in the project. Data were gathered from formal and informal conversations with the principal, the leadership team and Learning Hub (sometimes all together and sometimes separately), from meeting minutes and agendas, from a focus group consisting of all participants and from journals, reflections and photographs taken over the time.

³ Pseudonyms have been used for all schools

⁴ Forrester already had a leadership team that included members beyond the usual Principal and two Assistants. They were several staff members who had acted in endowed leadership roles in the past, as well as the Bursar.

My role as Researcher

As a co-participant in the research I was also a problem solver, an observer of emergence and a decision maker on the run. I brought a theoretical perspective to the issues and tried to link and connect what was happening at each site to the broader canvas of educational change. I brought together participants from each site to learn from each other, I encouraged principals to communicate their work with the broader community and I assisted in determining how that communication would happen. I identified barriers that were stopping the participants from moving forward and devised strategies to help them around the barriers. I coached and mentored both individuals and groups as the need arose and, when it was time, I retreated further into the background as participants became increasingly confident at leading.

Outcome

As a result of this research process I have developed a holistic approach to reculturing and restructuring schools as a possible way to improve the way they make decisions about the work they do. The approach consists of three interlinking elements that address the concerns raised by the literature and by my co-participants as we explored what needs to change and improve to create a sustainable learning organisation.

Chapter Synopsis

This research report is in six parts consisting of a total of 11 chapters. Deciding the order in which to publish these chapters has been considerably problematic – I must present my research report in an orderly, linear fashion and yet, as a mirror image of the design and implementation, the representation cannot be simplified quite so easily. I therefore ask the reader to live with uncertainty and read on to find answers to the questions you might have. The chapters exist for the sake of expediency. In reality this is one story that must be read as a novel.

Part 1: Sets the Scene

Chapter 1 - Introduces the reader to the background of this project. It takes a look back at where I have come from historically and why this topic has significance for me.

Part 2: Designing the Research Project

Chapter 2 - Describes the research design in broad strokes.

Chapter 3- Explores, in depth, the complex nature of relationships, rapport and representations, and the impact of each on the research project and participants.

Part 3: Exploring the Themes – Democracy & Decision Making

Chapter 4 – Critically examines the role of democracy in schools and where I lost and re found my democratic voice.

Chapter 5- Reflects on the complex and interconnected nature of decision making and suggests alternatives to the decision making processes that currently exist in my host schools.

Part 4: Auto/ethnographic Case Study A

Chapter 6 - Introduces Beachlands Primary School and takes the reader through the journey of how the project unfolded at that site.

Chapter 7 – Is where you get to meet Kate, the Assistant Principal at Beachlands. First she tells her story of what happened at Beachlands six months into the project.

Then we meet her again two years later to find out what has happened in the intervening time.

Part 5: Auto/ethnographic Case Study B

Chapter 8 – Introduces the second project school, Forrester Primary, and once again the reader is taken through the process as sociocratic governance is introduced into the school.

Chapter 9 - David, the Principal of Forrester speaks directly to the reader in Chapter 7. Then we invite the Learning Hub and Leadership team to join the conversation as author and participants reflect on the preceding two years.

Part 6: Re engineering Schools at the Speed of Change

Chapter 10 - Reflects back on my research questions and takes a look at the role leadership plays in a system under change.

Chapter 11 - This chapter looks at change initiatives in the past and what might have been missing from the picture. It explores why change in education is an increasingly pressing imperative. It goes on to describe the outcome of this research- a holistic, interrelated innovation to assist schools to reculture and restructure so that they can play a greater role in determining the present and future direction of education in Australia.

The thesis concludes with an epilogue that has been included to bring the reader up to date with current issues at Beachlands that might help explain why certain things cannot be said here and why some voices were heard only through the interpretations made by others. I do so in the context of developments at Forrester and in my current work place, Dust Cloud Unlimited. I invite you now to come with me on this journey.

Part 1

In the Beginning...

*In the beginning is my end...
You say I am repeating
Something I have said before. I shall say it again.
Shall I say it again? In order to arrive there,
To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.*

T.S Eliot, East Coker, No. 2 of 'Four Quartets'

Prologue

*With expanded awareness comes a desire for a new level of authenticity.
They refuse slow death and choose deep change. Almost inevitably, they
create patterns of influence. They develop a new voice.*

Quinn, *Building the bridge as you walk on it*. 2004

The realisation that I had lost my voice; my strong, confident, personal voice, dawned slowly, but once it was out there in the public domain; up for discussion, the impact of it took over my life. It was fine while I was (seemingly) the only one who noticed the increased difficulty I had getting words out! It was a struggle. My voice broke, wobbled and threatened to collapse in a heap. I gasped for breath, gulping and swallowing my words, I clutched my throat and groaned, “Oh, this voice, it hurts to even try and speak!” I lay awake at night, imagining that some terrible disease had taken hold of my throat and was squeezing the life out of my voice box. I tried sucking lozenges. I ate food that would be kind to my throat. I tried speaking louder; breathing from my depths. I downloaded a speech improvement program and, in the sanctuary of my bedroom, practiced saying EEEEEEEEE and eeeeeee and AHHHHHH and ahhhhhh... I tried to hide my disability under the guise of laughter. I tried speaking with a deeper voice. I tried taking deep, full breaths; allowing my words to slowly exhale. I tried calming myself inside before I spoke - for the more my voice deserted me the more my whole being felt diminished.

My voice was publicly outed in a series of events that caused me to finally seek medical help for what I now believe was a serious condition. The first event occurred on a day I was scheduled to present a talk at an e-conference. I was well prepared and the presentation went smoothly. However, the feedback I received was not about the content of my talk but about the way my voice wobbled and broke and that, “People would find it uncomfortable to listen to you.” Several days afterwards a colleague asked me what was wrong with my voice; my children admitted that they had called a family conference about it, fearing the worst. To them, I sounded as though I was about to cry all the time, to others I sounded nervous and uncomfortable. Neither summation was correct, yet, even to my own ears, I understood that’s how it might seem. My loss of voice had turned me into not me. I

had become someone else; someone who could no longer speak with authenticity and conviction.

I filled in the form as I sat in the speech pathologist's sunny waiting room. I'd taken my problem into my own hands after a series of unsuccessful medical appointments left me undiagnosed and in an endless queue that exists somewhere between private health insurance and an under resourced medical system. My first appointment began with question time; when did I first notice the problem, and what kind of impact was it having on me? My replies were descriptive and specific about the physical implications of losing one's voice. Then suddenly, it became about something else. Suddenly, I felt the weight of this PhD crushing me and squeezing my throat and I began to helplessly cry. Suddenly, I was overwhelmed by a sense of unfairness as the implications of a loss of physical voice hit me. This PhD was giving me back my metaphorical voice and, in exchange, it seemed that I had to pay with my silence. You can't imagine how I cried. It seemed that every injustice I had suffered in education-every time I felt I hadn't been listened to or heard, every time I felt the pain of dualism tearing me from myself and my life-world-was choking me and scornfully laughing...well that finally shut you up!

And then something strange happened. As I talked about my PhD I realised that my loss of voice could be traced directly back to the time I left Beachlands, in disgrace, at the beginning of 2009. As I talked about it the speech pathologist smiled, "*Can you hear yourself now? Can you hear?*"

It wasn't a miracle, but for the remaining time I was there my voice became stronger and stronger. I felt the fingers around my throat releasing for the first time in year; I could speak naturally, without mentally controlling my physical body to do the right thing by me. I went away hopeful. I went away thinking, there's something more to this. There's something important still unresolved that is playing with your mind and you need to just go with it. In going with it, my plan is that this PhD will truly give me back my voice.

I'm counting on it.

Chapter 1: Journeys into my way of knowing

Introduction

And as for me, I implore fate to give me the chance to see beyond myself and truly meet someone.

Barbery, *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, p. 145, 2009

My thesis begins with my entry into the world of research as a novice explorer preparing to chart the unfamiliar territory of educational research. I begin with a vision of what education could be if re imagined as a deeply democratic space where all actors fully participate in making decisions about issues that impact on them. As I start my PhD in 2008 my vision blurs into a reality that threatens to capsize me right from the start. I grapple with trying to chart a route that will carry me safely through the turbulent waters that seemed so calm moments before. But that is getting ahead of myself! Before going there I first look back at the historical space I occupied, both educationally and personally, in the time leading up to my resignation from teaching in December 2005 that had a significant impact on determining where I am now. I tell a parallel story of my awakening as a learner, late into my career as a teacher, alongside the story of my pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago, a 764km walk from St John Pied de Port in France to Santiago in Western Spain that led to a different kind of awakening. This chapter sets the context that explains why, after completing my Master of Science Education in 2006, I was only just beginning as a learner. It explains why this thesis exists, and why it doesn't follow the beaten path of scientific method – why it couldn't. As with all the chapters in this thesis you will find my voice interwoven with my co-participants along with more expert voices layered between to lend support from time to time. The chapter ends as I come back to the present as a co-participant in a research project that will end as it begins with confusion and self doubt threatening to run my ship aground.

Who am I and how did I end up here!

So, I want to research, evaluate, and inquire. I want to dig more deeply into some aspect of my life-world that excites me. I've lived and I've read and I've talked and I think I see a gap in knowledge where my inquiry might reveal some insight into my chosen field. I plan my research questions, and design my project. I sign off on

ethical clearance and promise to do my participants no harm. It all seems so straightforward; go into a school and gather data from participants about their experience with democratic decision making. Interview, survey and collect vignettes. Observe and compare; find patterns to code and conclusions to draw.

The problem is it doesn't happen that way. My preliminary reading and inquiry, my thinking and reflection leads me, not to a question, but to a perturbing array of loose threads that tease me to try and find a starting point. I follow first one lead then another in my attempt to unravel where I might begin in the hope of revealing some insight into the world.

Each thread I follow develops into a fractal of scale independence and self-similarity that replicates my experience in the chaotic complexity of an educational environment. Where to begin? In my heart I know there is no defined starting point. In trying to find one I feel the same unsettling wave of pressure wash over me as I did when I once tried to explain to an irate parent why I asked a student to sit down at a particular point in the day. I failed miserably to appease her; it sounded like an excuse. How could I possibly explain my entire educational philosophy that led me to making that decision against her traditional, common sense knowledge about how a classroom is meant to be run?

My starting point? A vision.

Imagine...

Meryl swung her car into the parking lot of Sala Café, just around the corner from school. The café had become the preferred site for the senior school Learning Hub meetings this term and Meryl looked forward to a decent coffee to start the day. As she opened her car door she could see her colleagues already gathered around the table set aside for them inside the café window. The staff knew them by now and took their regular orders as they walked through the door. It was a nice side benefit of coming here; having a local hangout where the staff knew you by name was something that made her smile.

The group gathered around the table had settled into a comfortable alliance of shared dialogue and problem solving. Meryl felt for the first time in her career that she had the support of her colleagues; that it was ok to be serious about wanting to be a great teacher; that building on her knowledge and understanding of the work of a teacher was highly regarded in this group and that the administration was very open to shared decision-making about the issues that impacted on her work.

This month's facilitator called for an Opening Round comment and the now familiar meeting structure swung into action. Meetings had become purposeful and provided clarity for people now that the structure had been learnt. Everyone knew what had been decided and who was attributed to the action. Meryl couldn't believe how much they achieved now in such a short time.

Meryl was the elected representative in the Executive Leadership Circle and with this insight into how the school worked she was able to add value to the discussion and reveal reasons behind some of the decisions made in a higher circle. Everyone felt so much better informed and valued and Life Long Learning really meant something now.

Meryl took her seat in the circle and took a sip of her coffee as she greeted her colleagues. Work seemed so much less like work these days. Meryl liked the sense of trust that had developed in this group. She really trusted these people.

"Hey, I've come up with an idea... I'd like to throw it around today and maybe come up with a proposal for an innovation team..."

I envision a time when teachers are regarded as professional; not because of the amount in their pay packets but because of the knowledge they have about their work and their ability to speak coherently and confidently about what they believe in.

I envision a way of running meetings where outcomes are clear and decisions made based on informed deliberation rather than emotional gut reaction; meetings that realise the democratic ideal of communicatively competent citizens engaging in deep dialogue.

I envision a time when professional *development* is generated from within an organisation in response to the aligned purpose of the school and the envisioned futures.

I envision competent learners using their networks to collaborate on innovations that will grow the organisation into the future.

I envision a time when the real purpose of schooling is not buried under a fog of benchmarks and the myopic vision of external testing as the only way to measure success.

I envision a time when educators have the power to influence policy from *inside* not be knocked off their feet by policy from *outside*.

I hold this vision in my hand like a fragile bird and present it to my first host principal as a gift when we meet to discuss my research proposal. Let's unwrap it together I say. Let's work it out together and see if we can't create this place where people are being the best they can be. He questions me; his excitement and anticipation growing alongside my explanation of what could be. He takes the gift gladly, relief shows clearly on his face. He's new to this school and his entry hasn't been so great up til now. One staff-member after another is leaving and the flow doesn't seem to be slowing. He takes the gift with one hand and with the other he throws open the doors to the school, and I enter.

So how did I end up here? How did this me who is *just a teacher* feel compelled to step outside the classroom and make a re-entry as something else; a facilitator, a researcher? Have I changed in the three years I've been away? Am I different?

Before I can answer those questions I'd like to invite you on a journey now, back in time, to a less hopeful place; a place that I escaped from. A place where, like a dog running up and down a wire fence, I could see the juicy bone of learning, but, mouth salivating, I couldn't quite reach it. I had to leave.

A Pilgrim in the Workplace: A dual text that tells of two journeys.

The Setting: Writ in Black:

At home, preparing for journey and on the walk - Camino de Santiago

Writ in Red

Can't Take a Trick College and various other educational sites

The actors: Camino de Santiago

Kate – friend and fellow pilgrim

Rikki – 15 year old daughter and fellow pilgrim

Norway, Cuba, Plate Licker, Dirty Baguette Woman – all fellow travellers on the Camino

Can't Take a Trick College...etc

Carol, Dani, Louise, Marilyn and Francie⁵ were all colleagues and classroom teachers who agreed to be interviewed for my Masters Project, which is the basis for this chapter.

Scene 1: The Beginning

All research beyond the banal begins with uncertainty, where action is unanticipated and anticipations are unrequited. We enter slippery and uncertain ground. Paths grow faint, the footing unsound. In real beginnings we nearly always stumble, are misunderstood and lose our confidence or our way some of the time. This awkwardness seems unsightly, unprofessional, so we rarely tell beginning tales.

(Charmaz & Mitchell as cited in Hertz. 1997, p. 207)

The idea of a journey ignites my interest, even if it does mean walking 800 km across northern Spain on an ancient pilgrim route. I can only lie on so many beaches in Greece and look at so many fiords in Norway before I start looking around for a challenge, so why not spend a month of long service leave moving from one place to another at an antique tempo that my mother referred to as *shanks pony*.

⁵ Not their real names

All manner of paraphernalia is essential for the pilgrim walker according to participants on the *list serve*, a repository for all things trivial and fantastical about walking the *Camino de Santiago*. I was hoping I'd meet up with Bryn, who couldn't understand why packing boot wax was over-kill until someone suggests he rub it all over his body and leave everything else at home. The purists on the list serve react with predictable ferociousness; who put the grim in pilgrim?

Research on the pilgrimage goes well into my nights; excitement at the prospect of learning something new, meeting different people, having a purpose, learning about the traditions, the equipment, when to go and how to get there. Expeditions to buy socks, inners and outers, wicking sox that draw the moisture away from the skin, trousers that resist chaffing, hefting packs to judge the weight...so many choices, so many decisions to make.

It would seem that pilgrim-mocking is not a new pastime; in medieval times images on pilgrim badges depicted soldiers in battle, and representations of various religious and royalist sentiments were produced alongside versions, aimed to ridicule, that turned flowers into vulva being fertilized by small winged phallus. It's hard to explain to people why you are going on this walk. They question your motives; ask about training, "Are you doing enough training?" "Why would you want to do *that*?" HA! I know what I'D rather be doing!" "Well, good *luck* but I'm glad it's not me!"

Dulled by the predictability of my school days, the poster seems to reach out and grab me as I slink out of the staffroom with an illicit cup of coffee hidden behind my file. Forced into deceitful practices by a hierarchy anticipating the possibility of me tripping over a student and adding to the apparent mountain of student/scalding injuries, I place my escape in jeopardy by hesitating before the words QTP-Quality Teacher Program – FREE! The words *Technology in the Classroom* catch my eye and my life as a teacher – learner is launched.

I suspect that admitting to a fast beating heart at the prospect of learning something new will prompt a bout of eye rolling and a slander of 'get a life Joycey' from my teacher peers. The deluge of mockery that accompanies a spark of interest in

learning about teaching is something you get used to in this game. Like a bug encircled by fractious killer ants I ask one too many questions at staff-meeting time and I'm ripe for it.

Francie: Oh yeah, I get told to get a life all the time.

Enrolling in SMEC 555 Technology in the Classroom formalised my re engagement with the world of academia after a break of almost ten years. The single textbook and lecture method of my previous learning experiences replaced by a baffling smorgasbord of CDs, online chat rooms, websites, pathways here and pathways there and a bamboozlement of method that would eventually confound me; a technology enriched teacher manqué.

In the best (educational) projects, people are highly engaged and their excitement is evident, according to Stringer (1999). And so my listless engagement in the day to day machinations of teaching was spectacularly replaced by a frenzy of exhilaration as each night my computer explorations led me to a golden goose of possibilities. My Year 7 students became my canvas as I daubed and splattered my newly discovered knowledge like some crazed Pro Hart⁶ engaged in technological bacchanalia.

Carol: 10 Years ago I was excited about using computers. We had a pilot program and we had tech support, 10 terminals to access. I felt I was on fire. We could even plot...we were doing earthquakes and we could plot the actual tremors.

Dani: Oh, really, I can clearly remember getting that stuff. I can remember going out and getting a file and putting all the disks into compartments. I spent hours printing out the entire website I was that excited about it. I was that excited about it. I printed it out in colour. I should have realized then that it wasn't going to be an ordinary course cause there were all these

⁶ Pro Hart – Experimental performance artist from Broken Hill, Australia

*links...geez..it was like we weren't looking at a website, we were investigating the **WHOLE WEB!***

Scene 2: The Mountain

“What luck you have, a perfect day to be tackling the mountain! A day like this is so rare!”

Our Dutch host thrusts crusty rolls into our hands as we try to reign in our excitement. All that planning, all that searching for answers on the internet, reading other people's accounts of their experiences on the *Camino de Santiago*, the Way of St James, and here we are ready to begin our own. The cobbled streets of St Jean Pied de Port soon give way to a paved road winding upward into the Pyrenees and the border between Spain and France. Feet settle into boots as the beginning of a rhythm persistently pulls me away from my companions as they too find their own pace and our personal *camino* begins.

It is difficult to imagine, on reflection, why I didn't see the storm coming. The violent suddenness of it turns a soft autumn morning into a maelstrom of crashing thunder, lightning, torrential rain and brutal wind that combines to force me off my feet as I wildly looked around for somewhere to shelter. Too late to get out the poncho I had packed for such an occasion, drenched and frightened I debate my options, to turn back or go on. The reality of sudden weather changes in the mountains hit as hard as the hailstones pelting my bare head; my hat long gone over the edge of the cliff, carried off, along with my sodden bread roll, in the arms of a raging savage. I put my head into the wind and push on; I've come too far in planning this journey to give up now.

I pass pilgrims huddled in shallow ditches, clutching their wind-whipped possessions about them. I grab a woman's hand and shout, “*Come with me!*” But she whimpers and pulls away as the day turns prematurely dark. I determinedly push on, my companions lost to me as the weather begins to offer hope in the form of weak slivers of light in a sky angry with jostling rain clouds. My spirits lift, I see the path clearly now...just for a moment...then I trust my instincts, hoping the yellow arrow of the Camino Frances will appear to guide me on. One foot in front of the other, one, two, three, four, five....the mist rolls in and I remember that people have died

up here. I begin to cry and I cry and I howl at my stupidity and, in fear, I cry out loud like I have never done before. I howl loudly because I can, there's no one to hear me in this place of ancient ghosts of pilgrims past. I am encouraged by the sound of my own voice, I shout support, "*Just get on with it girl, stop the bellowing and get on with it!*" My personal cheer squad, rooting for me over rocky outcrops, through misty beech forests, down steep, muddy inclines into Roncesvalles in Spain; 10 hours and a mere 27 km later.



Needing hard copies of course notes is a dependency that has taken years to break; I had to make sense of the course, get it in order, *logicalise* it. On the computer I can't see the pathway clearly so I pump out acres of notes and try to put them into a system. What exactly *is* the task? Do they want me to do this or that? What now? What next? It all seems too huge and unmanageable. Follow this lead here and that lead there; where did I come from and where do I go from here? Turn back and retrace my steps or push on and hope I see the light I become frustrated at my limitations. Not knowing what I don't know and wanting to know it all I follow every lead, every suggestion. The more I knew the more there was to know. If a program is mentioned I buy it and try to master each component as if my life depends on it. I have flashing; wild affairs with Dreamweaver, Shelly Cashman, and Hyperstudio⁷ while a devilish mélange of websites taunt my sleep and wake me in the night, frantic that I have lost that great idea I had seen...where?

My lexicon becomes peppered with new terms; browser and CPU, multimedia and software evaluation, curriculum integration activities and technology-based student projects. I hunt out people at work who can help me link this document to that, "Oh, WOW! How come I didn't know that? I can't wait to do it with the kids." I push on, oscillating between excited revelation and despondency at my incompetence. I don't know where I'm going most of the time despite the excitement of the journey. I am torn between learning in my own way with having to complete the requirements of the course. What are the requirements of the course? I tentatively email my tutor who is chirpily encouraging but reveals none of the magic formula to me. I must push on,

⁷ Dreamweaver – a platform for constructing websites; The Shelly Cashman Series' cutting-edge textbooks make it easy to learn about technology; Hyperstudio – mulit media authoring tool.

encouraged by the knowledge that I am becoming a valuable resource to my profession. I am going where many teachers fear to tread and I am proud of my achievements.

Carol: When I discover something new I go, oh WOW! How did I not know about that? I used to get so angry and (feel) incompetent but if I do discover something I never forget it, if I come to it myself it seems so logical. Courses are just not...

I think in this day and age no one really values you unless you're computer literate.

Scene 3: The Paradox

Like the regions that the *Camino Frances* meanders through, each day reveals different moods and passions. Some days are like the sweet red wine of *La Rioja*, full of laughter and singing, warm breezes and friendship, shade and shared meals, resting by sparkling rivers and pathways made of soft beaten earth. Other days are as barren as the high *meseta* of Burgos, windblown and shade deprived, lonely and tiresome, blistered and sickening. Pilgrims dread this section of the *camino*, they tell you it does your head in.

Today I slow my pace to match the others, I need the companionship and we'd heard a rumour that the fountain in the next village actually has wine in it! It's true! Our water flasks are filled to overflowing and we fall in love with the *camino*. A day of hysteria and stupidity; *Monty Python*⁸ skits and *Deano*⁹ songs. I get to be the French singer in *Relax-ay-vous* and we hoot like owls at the lines, "*I'm as gay as a toon. You're as loose as a goose.*" We mock the religious fervor of pilgrims who we meet along the way. "*She's not the Blessed Virgin Mary; she's just a very naughty girl! Had a child out of wedlock!*" shouted in full-throated falsetto *a la* Life of Brian¹⁰:

Paula: You hear that? Blessed are the Greek.

⁸ Monty Python – British television series from the 1970s famous for its stream of consciousness approach.

⁹ American singer Dean Martin

¹⁰ Film from the Monty Python team.

Kate: Oh, it's the meek! Blessed are the meek! Oh, that's nice, isn't it? I'm glad they're getting something, 'cause they have a hell of a time.

Leaving Burgos for the 29 km walk to Hontanas my feet fail to give me the two hours respite that I've come to rely on. The day is blustery and hot, winds whip up the dust and make me grumpy and out of sorts. My feet have let me down; me, the fit one - the one who prides herself on being up to any challenge. My legs feel as though they are frayed at the ends, blisters on blisters, my pack pulls at my shoulders, unable to slip into the groove. Most days it feels part of me, today it kicks up a struggle, sagging here and catching there. Last night Kate drained my blisters by threading cotton through them and applying *Compead*¹¹. Every stone I walk over sends white-hot needles through my body and I wonder how the pilgrims before me had the energy and will to bend down and pick up a rock to add to the cairns along the way. I mutter, "*Stupid idiots, zealous nutters!*"

My life is defined by trial and error as I try to make sense of learning online and applying my knowledge in the classroom. My Year 7 students are as motivated and as excited as I am. They want to know how to do this and that, they push me to learn alongside them and if we can't work it out we ask Mr. Dowsett. He's the middle school technology teacher but he spends more and more time with my class because he likes how we get involved in our learning. We do partner websites on *Word* and link them through the server so that each partner can concentrate on a part of the assignment and together it creates a cohesive unit. Individual accountability built in, the students learn from one another. "*How did you do that? 'Wow, that's cool, can you show me...?'*" Late night searches on the internet, forgotten meals (Mum where's dinner?) fragment the home place as I try to fill the gaps in my knowledge with not enough hours in the day. I get through SMEC 555.

Louise: Personally, because I don't have a life (hahahaha!) and it contributed to the breakup of my marriage...seriously though, when you're a teacher learner there's nothing you can do to help yourself. So I don't look at

¹¹ Bandaid otherwise known as second skin.

*that and think I shouldn't be doing this. If you look inside yourself and think that's what you're meant to be doing...it's what you're meant to be doing for **you**. Society and others might look at you and say, you shouldn't be doing that but...*

The year 2000; a new millennia, a new unit, a new school; I take up the position of Information Technology Coordinators and a junior school class along with SMEC 556, Using Multi Media in a Specific Learning Area. The network is a mess; no one seems to even know who our Internet Service provider is and besides, the internet is random anyway. I start at the very beginning, tracing the connections, reading the paperwork and attempting to pin the boss down to creating a whole school policy. He agrees it's needed but is loathe to draw the staff into discussion. "Pressure and support" becomes his catch cry as he insists that teachers demonstrate the use of ICT in their teaching programs but doesn't listen when teachers ask for time to learn how to do it. CathEdNet, the Catholic Education Portal, comes online and there's something new to learn. I frantically create class pages to demonstrate how technology really *is* the way of the future. Secretly I am beginning to wonder if all the time I spend doing this is really worth it.

Marilyn: *Something is wanted to see for 'it' (investment in ICT Professional Development). Teachers say oh there's no time. They do the course, it looks fine, they have the support but they go away and don't do anything for three or four months and they're back to square one and then they're told to produce a page and are daunted.*

Dani: *We have a computer teacher. IT classes are totally unrelated. Oh, yeah, the teacher is quite good at telling me what they're doing. Could I link it? No I don't. Will I be linking it? No, I simply don't have time...does that person care about what I'm doing? No, there's no link there. The kids love it...How much real world connection? Well I'm not sure about that.*

Scene 4: The Work

Each day the work of the pilgrim grinds into a rhythm of repetition. Wake up, slip into the clothes you wore yesterday, boots over socks over feet that have been repaired the night before. Breakfast; maybe...if the bar is open this early, otherwise a hollow-stomached walk to the next town, sometimes 10 km away. You walk and you walk and you notice suddenly that you have noticed nothing around you. If asked, though, you can describe in infinite detail the feel of the road beneath your feet, the sharpness or smoothness of it, the colour and suddenly, in amongst the stony terra, a show of purple crocus that smile hope and gladden your step. Late afternoon lunches of *bocadilla* and wine and still 15 km to walk to the next *refugio*. The last 5 km kills! You can see the steeple of the next town in the distance, the near distance, but it's as if you are walking on the spot. Finally you claim your bed, shower and meet up with friends, unpack the day along with your sleeping bag, drink more wine and drink more wine and drink more wine and fall, exhausted into bed. With a bit of luck there won't be any snorers tonight...you wish! Cuba tells me I stole his bed. We drag a mattress onto the floor in the kitchen and have the best night's sleep ever!

I marvel at the simplicity; thirty four days of nothing but walking and eating and drinking. On the road I pass the time, some days, by imagining what I would be doing if I was at home. I laugh at the *me* of my pre pilgrim days; rushing about to fulfill the multitude of roles that made up my whole. Some days now I long for the simplicity of the pilgrim life.

Carol: No, I think we do things on the run...God! I'd just like to go home sometimes and flop in front of the TV!

Spending so much time on the computer at home begins to take its toll. My daughter stands in the doorway accusingly, waiting for me to raise my eyes to her. I explain that I'm doing an assignment, creating a Multi Media Presentation. She's unconvinced; I have no time for her anymore! Her father comes home and settles into his chair, remote control at the ready, waiting for dinner. I suggest I'm too tired to cook. "*I'll go and get myself a hamburger then.*" I have to eat and so does Rikki so I cook. He knows I'll do it anyway.

I test them: sit and read on the couch – acceptable, watching TV – acceptable, anything where I don't sit down – highly acceptable. I go back to my computer – *PAUL!! Do you know where..? MUUUUUMMMM! Where are you?* I rush home from school and try and fit study in before dinner. I wake earlier and earlier in the morning and while they're sleeping I make slow but steady progress. Sometimes I lose it. I shout, *GET THE HELL OUT AND LEAVE ME ALONE!* They eye each other and think; uh oh...she's losing it.

***Carol:** That's how I feel in my whole life; stay up late to meet the demands, juggle... to meet the rigour of both. Frustrated, I'm learning. I'm fortunate, my husband works overseas. There's no way I could spend all this time...*

***Marilyn:** Women are torn...can't do either well. You'll hear them say...you know...they (the administration) say your problems need to stay at home and yet your problems at school do go home. It seems like it's one way.*

***Louise:** Sharing a computer? Oh God, that was really, really hard. Often I would work around it so that he had it when he needed it. Even now, if he needs it for the business or the two days teaching he does I'll know on the Sunday and I'll bring the laptop home. I don't ever think about it so I make sure the computer's free so he can use it. Hahaha....balanced...I keep it balanced. He's never said anything to me. I've orchestrated it myself, I even get peeved about it sometimes...*

***Dani:** When I'm on the computer at home **it is** for school. It's more about me enhancing my teaching rather than getting the kids to use computers. I do all the jobs first; make tea, a little TV maybe, a walk...yeah, hardly ever. Start later and go to midnight.*

Scene 5: The Hospitalero?

In Medieval times pilgrims relied on a band of ground support that today would rival the organisational nightmare of the Tour de France¹². Webs of hospitals, refuges and towns grew up around the ancient route and have become the well-known, modern cities of Pamplona, Leon and Burgos. Notable along the route were the *hospitaleros*, people whose job it was to tend the spiritual and physical wounds of pilgrims as they passed through on their way to Santiago de Compostella. Pilgrims were fed simple meals and given basic shelter as their rite of passage.

The modern-day pilgrimage to Santiago is an exercise in survival of a different nature. The traditional pilgrim support has been replaced by bored inhabitants, eking a living out of unproductive earth, giving little thought to enterprise. Fellow pilgrims, while feigning camaraderie, *kill* in the race to the next *refugio* out of fear that the last remaining bed is taken forcing a walk to the next town. A battle of egos ensues; the purists, the walkers who go the entire distance on foot, maintain their distance from the cheats, those who catch buses to the next town. Cyclists are endured only if they wait till last to claim their bed for the night and the jury is out on pilgrims with donkeys. We huddle together and debate righteously who is doing it *right*, outraged by the *busers* who sleep in and beat us to the best beds. Hauling ourselves up onto a top bunk after a day of blistering walking, we silently curse the eyes of these mongrel pilgrims.

We lose track of Laurel and Hardy *ages* back; we wonder what happened to Belgium and Short 'n Tall. A day of easy steps but hard motivation leads us to a café and hey, there they are, greeting us like the long-lost *family* we once were. We are wary as we realize they have gone over to the dark side, they are *busers*. They travel only enough distance in a day to make the official in the Pilgrim Office in Santiago believe they have walked all the way; the stamps on the Pilgrim Credential show towns a reasonable 27 kms apart and the *cheats* receive their certificate of completion. Our former cohorts wheedle and cajole us, “*Why are you walking all the way, it’s fine to take the bus, everyone does it!*” They’re in hallowed company; even Shirley MacLaine¹³ caught taxis through towns and made it sound like a sacrifice. We know

¹² International cycling race

¹³ American movie star who *walked* the Camino in 2002 and wrote a book to tell the story.

it will make them feel better if we join them, give weight to the decision that haunts their thoughts, but we resist. If we give up now what would be the point of what we'd already done? There's strength in numbers and they want us to weigh in; a couple of heavyweight pilgrims like us would work wonders on their resolution. The experience toughens us up and we walk on as the group from the café jostles for the best spot in the bus queue.

In school we talk collaboration and act in isolation. The words mentor, teamwork, professional learning community and cooperation face up against days spent in classrooms devoid of adult contact. My students create Family Museums on PowerPoint, proving there is life after the flying title with crashing cymbals. I stay one step ahead, wary of sharing the excitement of what is happening in my classroom. I won't be thanked by my peers who already feel the pressure of too much to do; too much to learn.

***Marilyn:** Oh yeah, always (told by peers to 'get a life'). Like BLMs (black line masters) if you design your own or research something (people say) oh well, you don't have family. Oh...I don't really hahaha...I don't take it personally. They say it 'cause they feel as though, ughhh they can't do it themselves. It makes their position stronger. "I've got more in my life than your life." It gives them permission not to do it.*

***Louise:** People like you to speak for them but if you do they won't support you. In a staff meeting they just put their head down as if they didn't have the conversation...you're on your own.*

***Dani:** My first ever venture into interactive learning was with Netscape Navigator...it was an entire unit of work. I worked on it...it wasn't an easy thing. Everything I did was new; I made it a professional production. I stayed up late night after night overcoming obstacles. With every step I thought...oh...I felt so proud. There was no turning back; I kept going. I couldn't wait...I had a meeting with the principal and told him what I'd done. He asked if I could share it with the staff. I made up step-by-step sheets; I set it up to show this is how to enhance students' learning. I was that proud of it. I went through the whole thing; people just sat there in stunned silence...the*

first time anyone had said to me get a life. At least half of them left the sheets behind...it was the same way...it was the same as saying I disapprove and I realised this is a journey you take alone. It makes a mockery of Professional Learning Communities that they are trying to push. The tall poppy has to be chopped down.

Scene 6: The Myth

Mythology abounds on the *camino* and is perpetuated despite evidence to the contrary. The myth of finding the bones of St Iago, St James, created the *camino* in the first place as believers looked for ways of buying grace; a high-speed projection into heaven. Norway carries a battery operated device for scaring off rabid dogs. The device remains in her pack as we meet dog after dog along the way that lie prostrate in the dirt, distinguished from their owners only by their horizontal carriage. Still, pilgrims continue to post frightening *what ifs* on the list serve and carry sticks to ward off the mythical packs of marauding dogs. I dare these lumps of fur to rise up and make my day!

Galicia, the last province we walk through, is spectacularly green and mountainous. Traditional, labour-intensive farming practices ensured a population of poor farmers eking out a living on *minifundios*, intensely fragmented plots. Today, thanks to 20 years of European Union membership, every farm boasts a shiny green and yellow John Deere tractor. A Mercedes Benz car is proudly shielded from the weather inside barns reserved for the animals come winter-time. In the field a farmer and his wife continue the age old practices of cutting wheat with scythes. Backs bent to the task they clearly know that to make the technology work their entire lives would have to change.

I suggest to the principal that perhaps if teachers had computers on their desks they might have the opportunity to use them more. He tells me teachers need to be teaching. He doesn't want to see teachers sitting at their desks in front of computer screens. I tell him it's demeaning for a teacher to write reports on a computer set up for students, legs about her ears trying to get work done after school so that she doesn't have to take it home. He responds by buying 15 computers and setting up a lab; "It's good PR", he says.

The computers in the lab hum warmly in the corner for want of a purpose while the teacher goes about her day meeting urgent pen and paper deadlines.

Marilyn: We decked out the lab with 30 computers and I went to book the other day and the pages were empty. Weeks of empty pages...but when we were talking about it the teachers wanted it all. We need the lab with the projector to demonstrate...

Dani: An opportunity to create interactive curriculum? Doesn't happen...no talk of IT. We've mapped the curriculum...

Marilyn...find a purpose...well it must be your own time. You can't be caught at it in class time.

Dani: We're sent messages by email and we're told you must check your email but if we're found at the computer when we're with the kids then we're not considered to be teaching and that you're being bad. So you have to sneak your time at the computer...it's a sneaky time and that's not your job, so to speak. Yet you're expected to do it so you have to make a time and that's something as simple as using email, that's not even using technology!

Scene 7: The Reward

In Medieval times people walked the Camino de Santiago to receive full remission of their sins; those committed and those not yet contemplated. At the famous *Cruz de Hierro*, an iron cross mounted on a 40-foot wooden pole atop *Monte Irato* is one of the most emblematic spots on the pilgrim trail. For a thousand years, pilgrims have carried a single stone here from their homeland to place below the cross and make a wish.

I don't carry a stone and I don't make a wish; I sit on the edge of the mountain, recovering from the climb. Norway sits next to me; we've walked together today but we don't speak; we think our own thoughts. Nothing too deep is going on in my head. *Neato, downhill for the rest of the day into Ponferrada!* It's so peaceful up here and if I was spiritually inclined I might begin to feel the stirring of something.

Something stirs.

I'm shaken out of my daydream by a multitude of German worshippers gathering beneath the ancient cross and with full-throated praise they scare my emerging god away:

*Das bitt' ich dich, erhalte mich
In deiner Treu', mein Gotte!*

I slip my pack back on my shoulders and, without a word, Norway and I head down the mountain. The Germans' air conditioned coach passes us minutes later; a pilgrim hare and tortoise. "A group of people who go crashing through the woods and...scare off all the soulful things." (Palmer, 2004, p. 59).

A recent poll in the Times Educational Supplement (UK) revealed that 70% of teachers believe they have a vocation. As I read it I smile knowing that the Western Australian College of Teaching (WACOT) has an uphill battle in striving to raise the standard of the *profession*. I work late and long knowing that my reward is within; a sense of pride in knowing I am striving to be the best.

Marilyn: *Sometimes the reward is doing something with your kids. I have a vocation because I always want the best and I keep thinking can I make a difference in this child's life. Money doesn't reward me...oh well; my reward is in heaven...maybe...*

Louise: *The concept of a vocation is absolutely appalling – harks back to the days of nuns. They think I have to do that because I'm a teacher. I've just worked for ... for 2 months without being paid. They teach... that it's a vocation; I know that for a fact.*

Dani: *...interesting because of the WACOT registration to make the occupation more professional. We come and work at the fete and we do this and that; is that professional? If you look at other professions, lawyers won't take a phone call without charging. Can you picture it...it's not in the hierarchies' best interests anyway.*

Scene 8: The Burden

As a pilgrim I'm conscience of every gram I carry. We talk about what we have packed, how many; "Where did you get that from?" and I'm smugly happy that my cloth is of a lighter, more quick-dry consistency than the Americans'. To add something new, one must make room for it by leaving something behind. The bare essentials become more clearly defined by the day and soon I am able to put my hand on everything I need in a second. Drink bottle here, lip balm there, *Compede* in that compartment (with the nail scissors), and money for breakfast in that pocket; we simplify and eliminate according to what we truly need to complete this task. We work together to carry the load; no one asks you to carry more than your share; you'd have to say no.

When planning the pilgrimage, we envisaged days spent meandering through the Spanish countryside, stopping here and there under a tree to feast on local cheese and olives; a little wine, so a small silver platter seemed like an absolute essential. Along with the sitting mats, small knife, soft cooler and sheet they are left in Roncesvalles; carried for one hopeful day. The walk is possible when the load is balanced; manageable.

Creating curriculum enriched with technology becomes a full-time job. I see possibilities everywhere, and I am proud of what I do. My days become longer and longer as I try to balance my work load between being a student, a teacher, a curriculum developer, an IT Coordinator, a colleague, an administrator...I want to do it all, be everything and be the best. There's little time for discussion between colleagues, everyone is in the same boat; trying to work out what to do and how to do it; surviving.

Carol: Teachers are struggling as curriculum designers, implementers. I know people will say that's what teachers are supposed to do...we don't want to go back to a syllabus but...hang on a minute...teachers want to teach!

Marilyn: ...at staff meetings people are looking at their watches, you can't have a healthy discussion because people have to get out of the room so decisions are made like that (finger snap) and tick it off the list. And you

think, “I’m still on a learning journey and I’d like help to interpret things.

The Curriculum Framework... it’s open to interpretation.”

Francie : *I don’t think we have time to think about what we do.*

I open the classroom earlier and earlier in the morning so that the kids can access the computers and I have time to *get through it all*. On three computers it is a bit of a struggle but I work it out. We find out how to save files to the file box on CathEdNet so that learning can be taken home. Students and parents email me, ask questions, and visit my home via the internet. We’re all excited at the possibilities that the technology opens up for us.

“Ms Joyce, I saw a program last night on Antarctica, did you see it?” Love
Kathryn

*“Dear Kathryn, I love how you take your learning beyond the classroom!
No, unfortunately I didn’t see it. Perhaps you can tell us about it in class
tomorrow.”*

I take a day off school, I’m tired and run-down. I open my email;

“dear ms joice I miss u joey”

I snap my computer lid shut, roll over, and close my eyes. I want to turn back the clock; I long for a simpler time.

I put in a Professional Development (PD) request to go to a networking meeting. I need encouragement from my colleagues. I want to know what other teachers are doing to cope with the ever increasing demands on our time. The form comes back from the principal

“You already know more than anyone else on staff; concentrate your efforts at the school-based level.”

I stare at it, puzzled. I know it's not right but...

Dani: *Oh absolutely...no personal voice whatsoever. Actually I have never come across an administrator who I could go to to discuss my frustrations, my...where I like my PD to go...be given the kind of support to receive...I have never come across that. So if I did express those sorts of frustrations and those sorts of needs to the administration that I have had it would have been pretty much pooh-poohed and made small.*

Carol: *I think if they (teachers) make demands the stock, standard answer is, "Get on with it. This is what we have to do so get on with it." Almost as if we are encouraged not to question. I think there's an underlying unrest but everyone just says, "Get on with it!" If you raise issues it makes you feel like you're a whinger...complaining.*

Francie: *Oh yes, you know the ones on staff who ask questions and you want to say...oh just get on with it.*

Marilyn: *Saying no, hmmm, that's a curly one. It doesn't happen and if you did you'd be viewed as incompetent. No, it's enough and I'll have to leave. You can't say it's enough and stay. You have to leave. Can you stay and say no? NO!*

I spend hours of my time creating curriculum that engages students and integrates technology in innovative ways. People ask for my units of work and I gladly hand them over, that's what teachers do. On CathEdNet we are encouraged to share everything. Inside I think, "I'd like to be acknowledged for the time I've spent", but it's not the culture. We are told teachers are so good at sharing resources it seems small-minded not to do what's expected. I hear of a teacher who has done a "Fantastic unit on Castles and Dragons." I think to myself, "That's my work, I created that. She should have at least acknowledged my work." I don't say anything; teachers are good at sharing what they do, aren't they?

Louise: *I think schools, all kinds of institutions; non profit organizations...you're on the losing end because they are going to try and get everything they can out of you. That's where their profit comes from; you*

and your free labour. They can't sell a product ... I think some organizations can't afford to be; Catholic Education is one of them. It can't afford to be.

***Dani:** If a place employs me then good for them because I'm not a teacher, I'm a teacher/learner – very good choice on their part because they'll get 100% commitment and enthusiasm from me and a lot of hours. They'll justify it by saying you're not paid an hourly rate.*

It all seems like too much, like my head is constantly racing from one thing to another.

I have to lighten the load, make room for all the new things that need to be done so I stop studying. I just leave Unit 657 unfinished and my enrolment lapses. I ignore the invitation from my tutor:

Pauline

Hi, I hope and trust all is well....

This email is an invitation, or if you wish a reminder for you to rejoin the online courses in Learning Technologies @ SMEC, Curtin University.

Your class records and grade results indicate that you were once enrolled in SMEC 657 but unfortunately, you were unable to complete. The semester 1, 2004 is just about to start... and I would welcome and look forward to your participation and contribution. I often find that there are many reasons why students do not complete a unit, sometimes it is due to health, pressing or changed work demands, family commitments or the work load of the unit of study or a breakdown in communication between the unit tutor and the student.

So... Pauline

Would you like to restart and complete your unit?

Would you like to work towards the completion of your enrolled course?

I will look forward to hearing from you

Have a great day

Bob¹⁴

Of course I want to restart, but I know there is no time to do justice to it. My family are happy; I'm back cooking regular meals and watching mindless television. It takes no energy. I begin to lose interest in finding new ways to incorporate IT into the learning day. I wonder what will happen if I stop engaging the kids in my class to learn in constructivist ways. Will they care? Will they miss it? *That* becomes my new research project; watching their reaction as I remove my self-imposed burden and fall back to old but less demanding practices. I notice fewer kids coming early to complete work before school, the drift to early morning handball is noticeable. I 'get a life'. I feel unfulfilled as a teacher, in creating time for everything that is urgent I compromise what is important. I wonder why I'm doing this; my creativity slides into hibernation and I wonder how I can get back the excitement and joy of teaching that I felt...was it really just a few months ago?

***Marilyn:** It's such a heavy load; everything you do has to be bloody marvelous!*

***Dani:** When you get to a point where what you have to do is against what you believe in you swallow your pride because it's your job, it's where you get your money from ...it's a huge consideration.*

Standing in the playground on early morning duty Gerda bounces triumphantly towards me, "*Paula, I asked Stan if I could talk to you about what you're doing in RAISe, come in and work with you to get some ideas. He said Paula's opinion doesn't matter...hahaha!*"

I laughed, "*Yeah that'd be right!*"

¹⁴ Not his real name

I work through the day, nothing too different about this day from any other of the previous days that made up my 33 years in education; nothing too different except that comment gnaws at me and Dave Matthews sings over and over in my head, like a taunt:

*Sometimes I can't move my feet it seems
As if I'm stuck in the ground somehow like a tree
As if I can't even breathe
Oh, and my screams come whispering out*


*As if nobody can even see me
Like a ghost, sometimes I can't see myself
Sometimes...*

I try to shake off the feeling but Joe Kincheloe's (2003) revelation that teachers who critically reflect about their place in education often leave suddenly made perfect sense to me and at the end of the day I quietly gather my favourite resources and walk out, one year and three weeks short of my legal retirement age; unburdened. Is this what WACOT meant in their advertising? Is this *exiting with dignity*?

Scene 9: The Ending...the Beginning.

The camino ends with a celebration in the tradition of ancient times. I fulfill the age-old rituals; touch the column on the Portico de la Gloria, slipping my fingers into the indentations made by pilgrims past. I marvel at the mesmerizing rhythm of the botafumier as it swings plumes of incense over the jostling, hugging worshippers. We made it! There's Norway, Cuba, Plate-licker and Pixie-partner, Dirty Baguette-woman; Laurel, she hugs me and whispers, crying, 'I wish I'd done it like you.'

Some pilgrims walk the extra 100 kms to Finisterra to burn their possessions in a form of legendary custom. I'm just glad to have made it here. We go out for a final dinner and talk about how strange it is not to have a pack on your back, not to have to get up in the morning. Inside we're missing it already; the pattern it gave our days, the simple purpose, the rhythm.



*Louise: (on leaving the teaching profession early) Is the journey over?
Definitely not! I am able to be that person I want to be without the paradox.
The less I am in an educational setting the more of a teacher I feel. Doesn't
make sense really does it...hahahaha!!*

On that note...

On that note I sit here at my desk in the postgraduate room at the university and look back over the last two years to see how far I've come. How can that distance be measured? Do I look different on the outside? I wonder what wonder looks like... I wonder if you can see my hope and reach out and touch that lively thing! Is it my excitement that makes my hair hard to manage in the morning? Is it obvious to that person walking by that I sit here struggling to contain the paradox between emotion that tears at me and a call to action that drives me forward?

If you peel back my onion skin layers you'll see the transformation from a know-it-all to a want-to-know-it all, from a loner to one seeking understanding with Other. From needing to have all my questions answered to being able to wait patiently for the answer to be revealed. The words of Rilke somehow speak more profoundly to me than the "I want it all, and I want it NOW!" mantra of my yesterday. He says;

*Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart
And try to love the questions themselves
As if they were locked rooms
Or books written in a different language.
Don't search for answers now, because you would not be able to live them.
And the point is to live everything.
Live the questions now.
Perhaps then, someday in the future, you will gradually,
Without even noticing it,
Your questions will be answered.*

As a teacher I didn't believe my questions had acceptable answers. I believed that in knowing the answers I wouldn't want to live them. It took me far too long to take that step outside the classroom and, while I don't regret the time I spent as a teacher, I regret the long time I spent not being a learner. The contradiction between teacher/learner, within the constraints of the school environment, was never going to be resolved for me unless I took a step outside to sever the apron-strings tied to a disapproving mother; to stand alone. In becoming a teacher I lost track of myself. I lost the connection to others. I lost my belief in my ability to make choices, to decide what was best for my students. I lost my capacity to be a confident, competent person doing important work and believing in it. I became reduced to a pulp of indecision and compliance until something hit my bottom line.

And so I left to become a Facilitator. But, wait a moment, wasn't I already a facilitator? After all, I had lived through the shift in Western Australia during the 90s from using a syllabus to tell me what to teach, to using a Curriculum Framework to design my own curriculum when suddenly, it seemed, no Professional Development was complete without someone chanting at us that we were no longer the...

Sage on the stage but the guide on the side !

Instead of lecturing acquiescent students who we hoped were listening, watching, reading and studying, we were challenged to change our practice to do this thing called facilitating. And so we redirected, questioned, challenged, modeled, and clarified. We became trouble-shooters, according to some literature, as we moved from directed teaching, filling up the empty vessels, to facilitating students' interaction with the learning material.

So, why did I falter when asked if I would facilitate community engagement for a large resources company? Wasn't I just hanging around waiting for a marvelous opportunity to reveal itself whilst I whiled away my new-found freedom by completing my Master's Project? Wasn't I just dying to prove what I'd heard people say many times, "Teachers have such an amazing array of skills that are transferable into all kinds of things? Why did I say, "I couldn't possibly do that?" It seemed to

me that this *Facilitate* had a different angle to it, it seemed that my idea of facilitate didn't quite fit what I was being asked to do.

It'll be a piece of cake!" my contact told me. "Just treat the punters as though they're kids in your class."

A friend went off and bought me a book on "How to Run Meetings."

"Run it like a staff meeting," she suggested, "Just let everyone talk at once and don't agree to any action whatever you do!"

We laughed over suggestion 1. The Agenda. "Geez, I've never seen one of those!"

I made a few inquiries to people I knew in business where community engagement or public participation was beginning to be part and parcel of their operational strategy. I was directed to a group called the Australasian Facilitators' Network (AFN) where I discovered that a Facilitator is a term for someone who is in the business of designing and facilitating a process to achieve an outcome or outcomes for a client or sponsor. I read that the word came from the French *facile*; to make easy. Unlike in the field of education this Facilitator was not responsible for the content of the event.

This Facilitator stood only for the process, to ensure all voices were given an opportunity to be heard in whatever capacity the sponsor deemed was appropriate.

I wanted to know more about this Facilitator; how much input would she have in designing the process, what was the scope of her power in ensuring hegemonic interests did not dominate the discussion and what insights and voices might be taken into account for future development in these communities?

I liked the idea of standing for a process and making it easy; I liked discovering that many businesses believed more ethical outcomes could be possible if an outsider facilitated the process as they were privy to, but not constrained by, power-plays within the organisation.

I liked the idea that, for the first time in my life, I would be really challenged to live out my beliefs and values in going about my work. It made me think of a principal I once had who used to get cranky that Catholic teachers just assumed their shared values. According to him they'd say, "Oh, we care about the students", as though their State School

Recently, a newbie Facilitator posed the question to the AFN members on the list server, "How much training do you need to be considered a Facilitator?" A reasonable question one might think and certainly it seemed no more controversial than many questions asked of this group so I was unprepared for the explosion that followed. A spray of vitriol ensued; angry parrying and thrusting that devolved into name-calling between teachers, academics and business practitioners over who is a 'real' Facilitator. I watched the debate unfold before me, as the list allowed me to 'listen' to every angle, to shift my point of view, to embrace many views and to develop a growing understanding of this role of Facilitator. I watched as facilitators forgot to facilitate, I watched as they regained their composure or withdrew to lick their wounds and reconsider their stance. I watched as they came back into battle with renewed vigour and an enhanced arsenal of rhetoric. I watched as, finally, the fur settled and a sense of peace descended once more upon the group. But mostly I watched as several Facilitators continued to guide the process, accepting the anger of some of the group, bringing the group back to the core values we had agreed to when we joined this network, slowly...slowly...moving the group into a more pluralistic space where multiple views could be appreciated. Their commitment to the process of the discussion, a commitment not to be intimidated or silenced by powerfully loud and angry voices taught me much about what it means to be a Facilitator.

As to whether a teacher is a facilitator, I'm not sure that matters. What matters to me is finding ways to allow many voices to be heard, listened to and understood. afn@lists.net.au

Figure Two – An aside

counterparts did not!” I think I may have assumed my values too in a way that disavowed other ways of knowing and believing.

And so, despite my protestations I felt a stirring of interest, an unfolding of the desire to learn that I’d boxed up and stored away out of sight over the last few months.

*I want to unfold
I don’t want to stay folded anywhere,
because where I am folded, there I am a lie.
And I want my grasp of things
true before you. I want to describe myself
like a painting that I looked at for a long time,
like a saying that I finally understood,
like a pitcher I use every day,
like the face of my mother,
like a ship
that took me safely
through the wildest storms.*

-Rainer Maria Rilke

Who Goes There?

On Monday I begin the interviews. As I walk into the school I recall, maybe 8 years ago now, a researcher coming into my classroom. She mainly interviewed students for her research but on several occasions she interviewed me and once she said to me, ‘My supervisor said, “That’s a teacher who wants to know more”.’ At the time I really didn’t think too much about it. I didn’t think to think.’ Do I? Do I want to know more?’ One day, much further down the track, I become aware of those words playing over and over in my mind and I conceptualise this wanting to know more about the world; about me and it and us. And I felt a stirring not just to want to learn more, I wanted to *do* more. I wanted to be more accountable to the world and my fellow human beings.

Can you imagine how hard that is for me to write down! It's there, I said it and it wasn't so bad after all. You see, I have never been *out there*; a doer. For example, I'm a half-hearted recycler, I quietly think about sustainable practice without being committed to it. I put the aircon on at night because its noise is preferable to the freeway traffic that swells up through my open bedroom door. I think of the cost, both monetary and environmental, but what the hell! I like the idea of slow food but I buy exotic fruit that has been shipped from distant places. I throw my used glass in with the rest of the rubbish and drive a fuel guzzling car to yoga, a not unpleasant 10 minute walk from home. I'm not committed to yoga; like food, sometimes it's too slow. I like the look of integrity but the taste is not one I've acquired yet. I'm morally unfinished; my values up for realignment.

I'm not involved in the world, that's really what I'm saying. I admire the marchers, the protesters, the dissenters, the passionate doers, the tear-filled eyes speaking of injustice. I'm a fringe-dweller on the edge of moral outrage. My outrage is done on the couch, glass of wine in hand; I tell them what they should do to fix things up! I subscribe to the body of thinkers who widen our eyes, shake our heads and say with relief, well what can one person do after all! How could I possibly make a difference?

So look at the me entering this oh so familiar space to begin my interviews. What is it with that lump in my throat? What are these tears threatening to leak over the rim of my eyes? What of my heart beating in my ears? What is that swirling mass of ideas and passions that keep me awake at night or silence me mid-action to listen to the internal conversations I have with thinkers who have finally stirred me to act? What is this sense of excitement at the thought of engaging teachers in dialogue about their lives, their work, and their passions? What is it that's driving me to want to make teachers' lives better, more respected, more relevant? What is this feeling of desperation to help teachers avoid being considered the variable in the educational process; give it a script and it will be rendered harmless! Who indeed is this person setting up for these interviews? Where did this walking emotional response come from? Where is the pragmatist who once cried, not tears but absolutes. *School is for school things; leave your problems at home! Leave your heart and soul at home; just get on with the job.* She seems to have lost the plot!

Here I am now, overwhelmed by either/or options. Should I say this or this? Should I give this amount of background or that? I am fearful of being considered just another so-called expert. I carefully build friendships. “Hi Craig, how’s your day going so far?” Craig has not chosen to be part of the study. He comments in the meeting, “Gee, we’d better get back on task since we have a PhD student watching us!” I crack jokes with Craig. I sense he sees me as a threat to his resistance.

I don’t know if there was a defining moment that prompted this need to act. Was it the realisation that we never get to talk about our work as teachers; I mean, really make sense of it? Was it hearing the term deep democracy or deliberative democracy and thinking, ‘Well, if this is going to happen in classrooms teachers need to experience it first hand?’ Was it facilitating community engagement *up north* and realising how strongly people desire to have a say about what impacts on their lives, was it reading the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and feeling like someone had finally given me my voice. Was it Kinchloe prompting that we never talk about democratic forms of governance in schools, or of Habermas with his call for citizens with communicative competence as a way to realise democratic utopia (in Rosenfeld & Aranto. 1998). Was it in the realisation that systems thinking and sustainable practice could relate to humans as well as the environment? (Sometimes the obvious isn’t that obvious to me, maybe it isn’t that obvious to others either!) Was it training in Sociocratic Governance or engaging in Open Space Technology? Was it in seeing how the energy level stayed at a high when teachers got the opportunity to self-organise? Was it the discovery of a deep desire to share my learning with other teachers and the realisation that this is my spirit? Hegemony, dialectics, agency, cybernetics, complexity did any of these concepts play a part? Was it...was it...was it...does it matter? I’m here now and I suck in a deep breath and slowly let the air expel through my pursed lips like a silent whistle in an attempt to calm myself.

As I walk towards the administration block, in my first host school, my thoughts swing to the work I’m about to do and begin the task of challenging me to go beyond the borders of my previous roles in schools. Can I go into these interviews and listen with all of my being? Can I tolerate paradox and dialectic? Can I stop myself from interpreting what my co-participants tell me? Can I be a co-participant when I’ve always been so individualistic? Can I stop myself from giving advice? Will I hear the

desires and passions expressed to me, am I open enough to find the gold in these conversations? Hopefully you will see some hopeful answers to these questions as I set about becoming a facilitator of change. You will certainly see me stumble and fall.

I wonder at my right to feel these emotions about a research topic that, let's face it, is hardly going to make an impact on the world. I think about important research that saves lives or environments; high-profile research that really matters. Climate change, aboriginal children, genetically modified food, stem cell research; these are ethically charged and emotional topics that deserve lumps in the throat and tears on the cheek. I am abashed by my emotion, therefore. And yet, yesterday - Sorry Day¹⁵ - I listened to the promises for a better future for the indigenous population of Australia. They said education is the key to the future. And I say to my dual self as both speaker and audience, *'Yes, and yet another initiative will be implemented into schools by not collaborating with teachers, by not allowing them time to create shared understandings, by not allowing for dissent, by not building in evaluation of the initiative, by saying it's policy, by speaking of democracy while practising autocracy, by politicising the curriculum, by overlooking the ongoing educational needs of the cohort who will be responsible for implementing the policy. "Go on, write us a script", I say. "Then you might guarantee that we won't stuff it up!"*

I hear the federal education minister hyperventilating over the latest technological advancement in New South Wales that will allow students to, "OH, WOW! Speak to students in Canada, via the SMART Board and web cam!" And I understand when one principal has the courage to be the *wet blanket* in amongst the political 'spin' when he questions the lack of investment in teacher education.

I feel a life-time of frustration at being overlooked as a key player in the educational process. I feel a life-time of not quite being trusted to speak coherently about my work. What came first, a lack of voice, a lack of trust in myself, a lack of agency...which one? And so in my first staff meeting, at Beachlands Primary School, I come as an observer, an outsider, so why am I so nervous about feeling that

¹⁵ 13 February 2008 formal apology to the Stolen Generations, led by then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd

lack of trust? Why am I no less affected by the impact of the principal's words? I feel sick. I feel like an escapee. I feel responsible.

Budget Item

The principal introduces the steps he wants teachers to take to determine how the budget will be allocated this year. It's all new to them. With their last principal they were just given the money that they could spend and that was that. This new principal wants to make it more *collaborative*, he's giving these teachers a chance to step up to the plate and be responsible. At least, that's what he tells them.

Principal: *These are the steps I need you to take. You might think it's your money to use; it's not! It's OUR money. I have to have a single person, single to form-guidelines, need people to be part of it, be serious about spending our money, you need to decide here, we're running a program here, don't just say, what are we going to buy to improve our kids' learning, you decide in the end, but think about it.*
(transcription of staff meeting notes, January 31st, 2008)

The Principal paced up and down as he spoke; his tone suggesting that he'd done this before, unsuccessfully. His voice wearily spoke of defeat. What I heard him say was:

Despite the fact that I am giving you this responsibility you WILL stuff it up. You will not volunteer to take a role, you will not spend the money wisely, you will think this money is yours, you will not think ahead about the programs you are teaching before you spend the money, you will spend it on trivial items because you just like the look of them, you will be swayed by random advertising, you will not be serious about the way you spend the money, you'll forget you're running a program and that the money is supposed to enhance that program, you might think you know but you don't, you won't want to be part of this, you will decide in the end but you will do it without thinking about it first.

I looked around the room at a circle of bowed heads. No one said, “*What are you talking about?*” No one said, “*Why do you think we are going to make such a mess of this?*” No one said, “*I know it’s not my money but I’ll spend it as carefully as if it is!*” Was everyone ok with the way he spoke? Did no one but me feel as though I was a child with my birthday money clutched in my hand and my mother admonishing me, daring me, to spend it wisely?

Yes, I envision a time when our students are able to speak and act with care about their worlds, to act ethically and morally towards each other; to make informed decisions through dialogue rather than debate, to reach consent rather than consensus. But I wish it only in the context that teachers have modelled these ways of being in the world, that teachers have shown by their actions what it is to be a communicatively competent citizen. I think it’s vitally important. This research is my chosen spiritual pathway and today I’m smiling.

Part 2

A methodology of emergence in educational research

A politician uses science like a drunk uses a lamp post; more for support than illumination.

-Lowe, as cited in cited in Barclay, 2010

Overview

Part 2 of my thesis is comprised of two chapters - Chapters 2 & 3. In Chapter 2 I discuss my research design and how it evolved out of the practice of *doing* my research. Whilst I took into consideration those design elements that were visible to me as I constructed my candidacy proposal, many more emerged to become part of the fabric as a design feature of critical-auto ethnography steeped in complexity methodology. I explore each of the design elements in turn, suggesting the standards by which my project might be judged and I present the ethical considerations that were central to my design. I conclude Chapter 2 by identifying a dilemma that led me to write a further chapter in this section to help me address some of the more intricate ethical considerations that arose. In Chapter 3, therefore, you will read about relationships, rapport and representation as I deconstruct my understanding of each concept and apply my understanding to the ethical dilemmas that were part and parcel of my research process. Chapter 3 concludes with an appeal to the reader to recognise that “all truths are partial and contestable” (Van Maanan, 1988, p. 34) but in doing so I do not shrink from my “intellectual and moral responsibilities” as a researcher (p. 1).

Chapter 2: Selecting (selected by) the tools for designing and undertaking my research

Introduction

I began designing my research project knowing that choosing a clearly constructed, linear design would be less problematic and straightforward than the plan that had begun to ferment in my mind (Luitel, 2007). However, the belief that the only research that really counts in school improvement-empirical evidence based on randomized controls (Bridges & Smith, 2007) did not sit comfortably with my way of knowing about the complex environment of schools. I had no desire to dismiss the value of gold standard research, but I knew that the kind of research I envisioned required something quite different. Never-the-less, the spectre of science that values only hard, objective and tangible data was like a monkey on my back as I set about designing and planning my research project; a practical inquiry intended to inform, illuminate and improve the way decisions are made in schools each day; an empowering and transformative act in reclaiming democratic citizenship, as discussed by Beane and Apple (1995).

What became clear, over time, was that a multi-paradigmatic approach, championed by Taylor (2008), would be the best way for me to realise my educational vision within a moral and political context (Jones, 2008). I was to learn that each paradigm I chose came with a pallet of “assumptions, laws and techniques for their application” that situates them within a relativist ontological construction of contextual assumptions rather than universal laws (Willis, 2007, pp. 8-9). My emergent research methodology-critical auto-ethnography-draws epistemic succour from the interpretive, postmodernism, integral and critical research paradigms. Together with a number of referents-complexity and chaos theory, quantum theory, network theory and a pedagogy of hope- they provided me with a microcosm of the research field by both determining and reflecting the emerging and iterative nature of the research design, practice, analysis and representation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b). They allowed me to bring a different lens to the data to reveal a multitude of layers that might have otherwise been left unexplored.

I begin this chapter by describing the elements of design that I anticipated would be in my research project at the time of my candidacy. I then identify and describe the paradigms that emerged to help me explore, and understand better, the complexity of the research field. They became, in equal part, the design elements (the lenses through which I gathered the data, deliberated over and interpreted its meaning) and my own emerging understanding of the research project I had undertaken. I conclude the chapter by discussing the limitations of the author in undertaking this research as she is, at times, more politician than emancipator.

The Researcher: With the “The ‘eagle eyes’ of theory”¹⁶ and the powerful desire to act

Since decision makers cannot know everything before they act, they must learn through their actions as they go along by observing their consequences, making inferences about them, and drawing implications for further action.

(Steiner, 1983, p. 378)

My research design arose from an assumption that conceptions of participation, citizenship and decision making needed to be deeply explored if schools are to become sites where democracy is re-imagined. My reasoning behind this assumption is investigated, in depth, in Chapters 4 and 5 but, pragmatically, I began by thinking about the many failed attempts at creating professional learning communities (PLCs) in schools and the many hours that I had laboured, with the best of intentions, alongside my peers, trying to make PLCs work. We believed that what teachers did, and how they did it, made the difference to student learning, but our efforts, in trying to get dialogue to happen and for people to take action to improve the work we did, were often overshadowed by the relentless task of getting resistant teachers to become learners¹⁷. We always seemed to be focussed on the wagging tail and not the dog. Therefore, I wanted to redesign the way teachers engaged together and I had a

¹⁶ Fine, M., (2007) Expanding the methodological imagination, *The Counselling Psychologist* 35: 3 459-473

¹⁷ It is important to point out that not all teachers are considered resistant learners by the author but to acknowledge that as leaders of peer learning we often only focus on the negative influences in the school; the right conditions would have revealed that we already had committed followers.

hunch that it had something to do with the way decisions were traditionally made in schools via a causal logic of stability, consistency and order (Steiner, 1983).

I knew that meetings didn't work to support good decision making. I'd sat through enough meetings in my time to know that they were like the fake front of a saloon in a spaghetti western; just for show. We teachers all knew that decisions were made elsewhere, despite being occasionally asked for our opinion; the meetings were just a front. In meetings only some people had a voice and that voice was often not encouraged to speak. On several occasions, in my teaching career, I'd been asked by the principal *not to speak* in meetings so that others could have their say. I was secretly delighted when no one spoke up during *those* particular meetings despite my silence. While my pragmatic knowledge about decision making is valuable, I knew there was more to it than that (St Julian, 2005); more that had to do with teacher capacity and self-efficacy, of trust and social justice, but, what to do about it I really didn't know. That is, until sociocratic governance fell into my lap like a gift. I went along to a seminar without really knowing what it was all about, and, right away, I felt that this could be a different kind of lure into professional learning; one that began at the level of decision making and proceeded through every level of taking responsibility for an idea, developing it and seeing it through to the end. I wondered, excitedly, could this be the way to empower teachers to speak and act confidently about their work? Could this be a way for leadership to emerge organically at every level? Could this could be a way for systems to be put in place to support informed, sustainable decision making? Could this be a way to link the work of the academy with its practice in schools? Could this be a way for me to develop as a leader of change? It seemed that sociocratic governance could offer more than just a rebranding of the way we'd always done things in schools. It seemed to be an opportunity to redesign schools into places that embrace the wisdom of its greatest resource-its teachers-and I wanted to be part of that. I wanted to act and in doing so I would model "participatory democracy as both a method and a goal" (Greenwood & Levin, 2008, p. 71).

In practical terms, my initial research design was deceptively simple. I would introduce a different way of meeting and making decisions at Beachlands Primary School that would, over time, give teachers more of a say about issues that impacted

on their work. In my role as researcher, I would facilitate the changes and observe what happened. I would work with the leadership team to respond to emerging conditions so that, together, we might determine how to act on them. As my research got underway you'll see that the design unfolded with it, becoming more clearly defined as a multi-paradigmatic approach which finally revealed itself as the most powerful option in exploring - *What happens when teachers are given the opportunity to engage in deep dialogue about their work and their practice within a sociocratic, structure and process of governance?*

By doing so my objective was to:

1. Bring back dialogue into what Gadamer considers is the centrality in human attempts to understand the world (cited in Dostal, 2002).
2. Provide a means by which schools can engage in sustainable governance within a management structure already in place.
3. Encourage educators to pursue their own research projects as they turn back and envision their own practice, world-view and way of knowing (Bishop cited in Willis & Carden, 2004).
4. Enable educators and other stakeholders to build capacity and develop personal voice as they engage in their work as co-participants.
5. Provide a route by which schools can develop their own standards-based accountability systems (Fullan, 2001).
6. Develop my own praxis as a facilitator of change.

Ethically Speaking

The understanding that undertaking research from a complexity perspective is a “profoundly ethical undertaking” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 15) largely slipped under the radar prior to my entry into the field, as you will see later in this chapter. Naturally, I considered the ethics of my research in writing my candidacy proposal, but as my project unfolded it certainly didn't take long to realise that I could neither ignore nor evade the emerging ethical questions that began to confront me. In Chapter 3 I demonstrate an ethic of care and responsibility, as described by Ellis (2004), by discussing in-depth the moral-ethical dilemma of relationship, rapport and representation in an attempt to understand my complicity in the problems that arose

while I was in the field (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2000). There are, however, further ethical considerations that need to be discussed.

Throughout my research I have adhered to the following ethical considerations for qualitative research as espoused by Guba and Lincoln (1989). I have used pseudonyms for each person mentioned and I have created imaginary names for the schools. Some of my co-participants were happy for me to use their real names; I declined to do so in order to protect the identity of their schools and their colleagues. I was substantially involved in the life of each school over a two year period where I was able to establish rapport and immerse myself in understanding the culture of each context and that is where, ethically, I believe its strength lies. My research design meant that nearly all my co-participants were engaged in interpreting the data with me and determining how to act on it. As the project proceeded and my co-participants began to act independently of me my role changed to one of observer. My methods of observation became a way of modelling how my co-participants could be more aware of what was occurring at a meta level, thereby seeking greater understanding of each other and of the system and its pressures and constraints. In attempting to present multiple realities in my thesis, and to be mindful of representing them fairly, my co-participants were invited to write their own stories, to present their own version of events and to evaluate mine. I regularly emailed or spoke to participants to clarify information and to add further comments if necessary and I have provided an audit trail from my research report back to the source documents. In Chapter 5 and 7, the auto-ethnographic case studies, I have elected to present the conversations with my co-participants largely unembroidered by my interpretation as a method of allowing you to sit for a moment with their own representation of themselves and their version of events before I overlay mine. Van Maanen suggests that my method takes into account that “reality is not sliced, diced, and served up analytically, but is put forward theatrically without great concern for interpreting the recreated world for the audience” (p. 132).

The glaring deficit in all of this is, of course, my representation of The Principal. I would like to tell you that I was able to go back to The Principal and discuss my interpretation of the events that implicate him and that are depicted herein. You will have to trust that the reasons I could not were largely out of my hands (after you read

the coda to this thesis you will perhaps understand why). I ask you to trust also that, never-the-less, it is a critical aspect of my research and must be included. I have attempted to ameliorate any suggestion that The Principal was responsible for what happened by accepting that the problems that arose were all mine. I have spent many hours in conversation with others engaged in this project to ensure that my depiction of The Principal, and what happened during my time at Beachlands, is an accurate representation. I have changed and adapted my text according to the feedback I received. Not one of my co-participants suggested I omit the difficult stories. They all agreed that they told a ‘truth’ about life in schools that is often veiled in secrecy (Van Maanen, 1988).

I must raise the suggestion here, however, that seeking an interpretation of the ethical issues that confronted me to guide my emerging complexity methodology is just as murky as the practice of it. My desire to present a water-tight ethical case for my research project is hampered by the questions that I continue to ask about it that seemingly have yet to be answered by those experts that it behoves me to appeal to for support. The ethical considerations suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1989) can explain and support procedural decisions but they are severely inadequate for a project design such as the one I undertook. The case for my design is made later in this chapter so the questions I ask about ethics are made based on the belief that the issues are not caused by design faults but are perhaps a case of ethical considerations not keeping pace with emerging methodologies. I wish to acknowledge that rather than accepting a reductionist way into ethics I am “emphasizing the reciprocity between methodology and ethics” (Shaw, 2003, p. 9) particularly in emergent research design.

Early on in my research the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee at my university gave a talk to students and staff. I was eager to hear what he had to say as I was already discomforted by some of the issues that were confronting me out in the field. His talk covered the usual traditional aspects of ethical clearance so I asked about some of the dilemmas I was facing; particularly questions about self-harm. The response from the Chair indicated that it was indeed a dilemma and one that was not easily addressed. I went away with the feeling that I was not alone in wondering how to respond ethically in undertaking this kind of research.

At the heart of ethics, according to Millett (2008), is choice, and more importantly the reasons I give for those choices. Throughout my thesis I have endeavoured to be open and transparent about my decisions and the impact that they might have on others. I didn't always make my choices alone but I do take sole responsibility for them none the less. I have tried to be reasonable and just in the way I interacted with co-participants as well as in the way I have depicted them. I trust that my ethical considerations have been strengthened by a daily examination and reflection on my interactions with my co-participants and will be seen here as a "reasonably honest effort (where) points of disagreement and value conflict still remain" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 136).

Packing the action tools to navigate, narrate and interpret the research journey

***Critical auto-ethnography*¹⁸**

Just as my co-participants in Chapter 9 agree that their conversation could not have happened before the introduction of sociocratic governance, so too, I could not do this kind of research before the advent of postmodernism and its invitation to see research as an emancipatory project (Wall, 2006). Auto-ethnography's roots stand *firmly* in the postmodern paradigm practising what is, according to Jones (2008, p. 207), a "balancing act" between "self and culture". Auto-ethnography describes a messy world full of contradiction and paradox. By adding a critical stance I signalled a desire to look beyond, and more deeply, into the people and landscapes I had become so familiar with in education in the hope of revealing stories viewed from a perspective other than my own. I was signalling a desire to represent myself as an actor attempting to understand myself in relationship with Other, thereby understanding Other better (Springwood & King, 2001). This was going to be intensely personal, and emotionally charged, research (Zembylas, 2004; Ketelle, 2004); an exploration into the work of a facilitator of change in an environment that I knew but did not know, with people who were my peers but were not. I had the task of not only interpreting their world but of leading them into the destabilising world

¹⁸ Auto-ethnography is written in many different ways in the literature. You'll find the explanation for my choice of representation in Chapter 5.

of change, knowing that some would not want to be/go there, despite my grand, emancipatory promises (Torrance, 2008).

I would need to be deeply self-reflexive throughout this project if I was to see through the eyes of the Other (von Foerster, 1991). I would need to continually call to question what I thought I knew from what I was seeing (Steedman, 1991). I went into the first site fearfully, and with a deeply held suspicion that I was, in actual fact, a bit of a fraud. After all, I was just a teacher entering this new world of research and I wasn't sure if I really knew what I was doing. I did know that there were stories to be told, and I wanted to hear my co-participants tell them in a way that a one-off interview could not achieve (Zembylas, 2004). I started with interviews anyway, because that seemed to be how a researcher goes about doing research; it was all I knew. But, even as I sat there video recording their responses to my questions, I also knew that what I was hearing was probably just as inauthentic as I felt. The constraints of my methods stilted and stifled the natural conversations that I *really* wanted to have - I had to do this better.

You would be forgiven at this point if you questioned my right to be let loose out there as a researcher. "What on earth does she think she's doing?" I can almost hear you say. My defence is to explain that my way of making sense of the world, and the way of the auto-ethnographic researcher are one and the same (Atkinson & Delamont, 2008). I could have spent more years preparing for my entry into the research site but, as Ellis and Bochner point out, in auto-ethnography there is no special formula, it is complex and doesn't proceed in an orderly manner, it is like being sent "into the woods without a compass" (cited in Wall, 2006, p. 120). My work, therefore, was to explore and to navigate my way through these woods. It became a way of knowing that increasingly made sense to me as I tried to make sense of the life-world of school, no longer as a teacher, but as a researcher (Smeyers, 2007). I expected to hone my skills and discover new tools, and find better ways to hear what my co-participants could hear; see what they could see and feel what they could feel (Steier, 1991). I felt a need to go slowly into their world and immerse myself in it. The difficulties and ethical challenges my new position presented for me are discussed in Chapter 3, but for now I took the advice of those researchers who had gone before me and I began to *do* research. I collected

documents-staff meeting minutes and agendas-I recorded meetings, made notes and jottings, and wrote journal entries; reflecting on and interpreting the world I had newly re-entered (Wall, 2006; Zembylas, 2004).

But then there was another thing...something began to happen that revealed the strong heuristic value of my research, first for myself and later for my co-participants (Raggatt, 2007). I began to generate data through finding solutions to the questions that arose as we began to change the way meetings were held. As each change created what I later recognised as a disturbance in the system (Stanley, 2005) I needed to go away and quietly reflect on what was happening to try and find a response that would lead to improvement. My dialogic self came into being as I entered into conversations between the different voiced positions I took to try and shed light on the complex life world of educational environments. In some instances my responses were to restructure the way the schools organised, in others it was to introduce a strategy, or protocol, that would lead to deeper learning in meetings and sometimes it was to help individuals navigate their way through problematic professional relationships that had broken down.

Journal Entry, 28th May, 2008

Today J¹⁹ asked if she could talk to me about something; seems she's got a few problems with the staff. She's pretty agro about it so I want to make sure I don't make the situation worse. I thought about the Non Violent Communication strategies that I'd learnt in a course I'd done recently, and figured that might be the way to go. She's at the point of reacting badly to individuals so I suggested she deal with it in a staff meeting. Is this the best way to go? I gave her multiple options and she decided this was the most effective one for her. For me it would be a way for her to model how to speak coherently and respectfully to her peers and still get them to hear her. She's going to say it in the opening round of the staff meeting...something like;

I have heard ...and it makes me feel...I need...

¹⁹ J is a classroom teacher

She said, “Yeah, that’s great. I can do that!” and off she went with a smile that wasn’t there when she came in.

I produced documentation for each suggestion I made. I created a dynamic process as a way of mapping the school environment to reflect the complex and ever evolving work that my co-participants and I were doing. I wrote a five-module facilitator’s course to develop the skills that co-participants felt they were lacking as leaders. I devised an integral framework, from my interpretation of Wilber’s (2000) four quadrants, as a holistic model to interpret and evaluate our thinking. Each response I introduced generated data that in turn produced different kinds of data that I then reflected on and interpreted to help us all understand and respond to the life world we were revealing and co creating at one and the same time. Everything I produced became a representative object for each world view I explored. My “tasks were sanctioned by the ‘paradigm’ because they are made possible by it” (Battersby, 1991, p. 122). I wrote emails, proposals and recommendations to each principal. I got emails back; sometimes I didn’t and that made me wonder...did I read this the wrong way, have I stepped over the line, am I expecting a response where none is needed? Sometimes I got emails from principals asking for feedback on issues seemingly beyond the scope of my project but increasingly part of it.

Email: received 17th Nov, 2009, 6:53 am

Paula

Your thoughts on the attached?

I reply

Email: sent 17th Nov, 2009, 6:53 am, 5:55 pm

Great concept! I’ve changed the tone of it a little to reflect a positive and inclusive invitation that makes it clear that you have everything under control. Love the connections that are being made and the communication channels opening up more. This is inviting a two-way contact and when it comes up to doing the strategic plan it will make so much more sense to everyone.

P

It was as Smeyers (2007) said it would be; my considerations, observations, and interpretations were based in the practice of facilitating change and, as each shift created a new problem, I felt a sense of disequilibrium balanced by a powerful desire to know more about the emerging conditions and the theories behind them. I didn't always have enough 'right-there' knowledge, at the time, to explain what was happening but at least I had the opportunity to leave the field to learn more. My co-participants did not have the kind of learning time that I had on my hands and I knew from past experience that they wouldn't necessarily welcome my scholarly wisdom. So working out how to take advantage of the emerging possibilities, without creating havoc, consumed me. How was I going to distil such a vast repository of knowledge about chaos and complexity into something that my co-participants could act on?

Creating chaos: more than just a nod to a complex life world

My preliminary foray into the literature on emergence turned up the observation by Wilson and Daviss (1994, p. 113) that reform in schools is often "chaotic, a risk to order and outcome that offers no clear benefits to offset the necessary struggle and disorder involved". On the other hand I was confronted by a wealth of literature that encouraged me to disturb the prevailing conditions so that transformative change could occur. Wilson and Daviss (1994, p. 112) whispered in my ear that my research was bound to fail if I didn't "grasp or acknowledge the need for an orderly process of change". But what I read about complexity theory told me that order would emerge out of chaos. I trusted that it would (Morrison, 2008) but could I trust my ability to balance just enough chaos with just the right amount of order? Did I have what it takes to work on the edge? Was the answer in my hands anyway? My tacit knowledge, about the way my world works, guided me to read more deeply about complexity. In theory and practice, here is a world that cannot be explained in fragments. Here is an interconnected world of interacting elements that work together as part of a bigger puzzle. Suddenly I saw sociocratic governance as a complex system and it made sense to me all over again. As I read about feedback loops and autocatalysis (Morrison, 2008) I found my heart beating rapidly, I could barely contain my excitement and an overwhelming sense that something in my universe had shifted. Everything seemed to fit with what I believed would occur through the introduction of sociocracy. My complexity ontology was born (Haggis, 2008):

- I *felt* that transformative change would only happen and be sustainable if people from within the schools valued their own wisdom and self-organised to reveal and share the wisdom within (Mason, 2008).
- I *saw* the life world of the school as a unified whole that adapted and evolved “through multiple interactions and transformations” (Alhadeff-Jones, 2008). I now understood this to be an autopoietic system.
- It was right that I should connect the I with Other and “avoid trivialized distinctions” that occurred when I framed myself outside of the context of my work and life (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 134).
- I connected deeply with the concept of a structure in motion “in an always-evolving, ever-elaborative structural dance” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 16).
- I was witnessing the evolution of my own consciousness and a growing sense that I could be more at peace with my past work in education. I was “shedding old beliefs, adopting a new morality, envisioning the world as I want to see it...” (Laszlo, E, 2006, p. 61).

I don't claim for one moment that my understanding of emergent sciences is anything but that of a novice, but, deep in my gut, the concept of complex adaptive systems explained *everything* about the world that was being created by sociocracy. Despite my deficit of mathematical and scientific knowledge, it just *felt* right. I wallowed in the seeming coincidences that began to tumble over each other to be noticed by my new vision of the world (Strogatz, 2001). They became my tools of choice as I tried to make sense of emerging conditions; they gave me clues as to how we could respond. On one memorable occasion I was driving home from a meeting at Beachlands Primary School when enlightenment struck. I'd been confronted, for weeks, by the limitations of imposing sociocracy into the traditional organisational model and I was ruminating over ways we could get better learning to occur within its constraints. There seemed to be too many hands passing information down the line and too many gatekeepers holding on to information that was vital to the purpose of my project so that by the time it reached everyone it had been distorted in so many

different ways as to be reduced to hearsay. I needed a way of opening up the communication channels and a way of breaking down the barriers, staunchly manned by traditional leadership roles, to achieve greater organisational learning. I flicked on the radio. I can't remember the show or the person speaking because his words took me on an immediate flight of fancy when I heard him say something like:

We realised we weren't getting the depth of learning and expertise that we needed to be sustainable so we created a new chamber orchestra group.

Is this what a light globe moment feels like? Wow! My mind began to race with possibilities. What if...what if...? The interview continued:

The group consists of experienced players and up-and-coming talent. It's a place to mentor new players and to learn how to lead...

That's all I needed to hear. That's what was missing! A place where the willing, not just the endowed leaders, could learn about the actual changes that were happening and learn how to lead in this very different world. I raced home and redrew the organisational structure of Beachlands Primary School and emailed it to the principal with a request for a meeting. The Learning Hub was born, or should I say, Learning Hub 1.0. I had read enough to know that I had to be on my guard in ensuring that I didn't replace one closed system with another. There would never again be an optimum way of organising, for "the very act of filling one niche opens up more niches..." (Waldrop, 1992, p. 317). Where would the next niche appear? I wondered.

Joining the dots

It sometimes happens like this...

You come home after a day of working *within* your research project. You might have been sitting immersed in the literature; reading more to try and make sense of something that is bothering you. Or you might have been facilitating a meeting with a leadership team, or you might have overheard a discussion between members of the Leadership Team about getting someone in from outside to show teachers how to...

You flop down on the couch, turn on the TV and up comes a tantalising trailer for a documentary: *How Kevin Bacon Cured Cancer*. You give a bit of a laugh and say to yourself, “We’ll, how about that. I didn’t know Kevin Bacon was a doctor as well. Hmmm... must be different Kevin Bacon.” My interest is piqued. I hurriedly get something to eat, pour myself a glass of wine, and settle in. Over the next 82 minutes several pieces of my research project puzzle fall into place as I watch a new view of the world revealed through the popular trivia game 'Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon' (<http://shop.abc.net.au/browse/product.asp?productid=760216>). Based on the idea that anyone on the planet can be connected in just a few steps of association, 'six-degrees of separation' was supposedly an urban myth. Through the film we discover it's at the heart of a major scientific breakthrough. *How Kevin Bacon Cured Cancer* examined the idea: that there might be a pervasive law which Nature uses to organize itself. The science was baffling but what excited me was what we could do with the application of the thinking to how schools work. I grabbed the back of an envelope and began to scribble my thoughts as they tumbled and tripped over each other. I had to get this down.

According to Bevir and Rhodes (2008), organisations, such as schools, mobilise around entrenched institutional patterns that conceive governance as a controlling mechanism. To view governance through the eyes of network theory is to “focus on the social construction of a practice through the ability of individuals to create, and act on, meanings...” (p. 77). Network theory seemed to reveal possibilities for learning about democratic participation by providing greater opportunities for dialogue and action (Spitzeck & Hansen, 2010). I could see the Learning Hub co-facilitators engaging teachers in innovation, each person identifying their passion and desire to work for the good of the community by creating their own meanings. The notion of Pods began to form in my mind, where each Hub facilitator guided a Pod that might consist of a group of teachers who met to dialogue about their work then regroup to pursue their own innovation. People would actually be doing something, not just talking about it (Watts, 2003). I could see these groups forming around an idea; investigating, creating and then disbanding and reforming in a different way when an innovation had reached maturity.

At Beachlands and Forrester Primary School the members of the Hub took on the idea of Pods immediately. They liked the idea of working with smaller, more intimate groups. However, for some time, they resisted the idea of groups forming and reforming fluidly around an idea. The need to hold on to control was eventually broken down naturally, at Forrester, when the effort of trying to lead everyone in the same direction kept failing. The idea of PAVs - Passion-Action-Vision groups - emerged as a solution to that problem and fitted with the concept I had originally envisioned after watching the documentary. I agreed with Hansen (2008) that creating opportunities for greater individual engagement would not only empower participants by developing their democratic ethos but would educate them in the practice of democratic skills at the same time.

The second important insight gained from watching *How Kevin Bacon Cured Cancer* was not so much a revelation about something I didn't know but rather a frame for thinking about what I had always felt to be true; that schools isolate themselves from the very communities that they serve and exist within. As Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler (2000) point out, the meeting and blending of ideas is vital for the health of a complex system, and yet, in schools the bunker mentality is all pervasive as we often keep the outside world at arm's length. When schools do let the outside world in it's often without first considering the wisdom that already exists within. Like the school that sent all of its teachers to professional development on how to write an exposition without first considering whether or not at least some of them already knew. As I watched the documentary I could see each person in the school connecting to their existing networks, both within and without the school as a way of valuing its wisdom, of creating greater opportunities for proximity to good information, and of learning from it. I envisioned all stakeholders acting together to improve the work the school was doing. As a vertically integrated organisation I could see possibilities for parents and teachers engaging in innovations together, motivated by their common interest (Watts, 2003). I envisioned myself remaining connected to the school as a vital part of their network, not just disappearing once my research project was over. Was I just dreaming?

A Pedagogy of Hope

Dum spiro, spero, "While I breath, I hope"

-Latin Proverb

What does it mean to have hope? A dictionary definition might go something like this:

v. hoped, hop·ing, hopes

v.intr. 1. To wish for something with expectation of its fulfilment.

2. Archaic To have confidence; trust.

What does it mean to be without hope; Hopeless? Is it as the dictionary says – impossible, pessimistic, defeated or unlucky? Is it to lack confidence in yourself or others? Is it what happens when trust is betrayed? It seems that, on the one hand, hope or lack of hope is in the hands of the gods. It conjures up images of a boat in a storm washing this way or that, dependent on the tides, the winds and a touch of fate. It seems to suggest that to have hope is simply to wish for something and leave it to chance.

On the other hand, hope, in the archaic sense, demands something more of us; to have confidence and trust, not only in ourselves but in others. In literature, hope is associated with heroic figures defying great odds and never giving up. In her analysis of Tolkien's work, Petty (2003, p. 300) claims that "The quality of hope is affirmative. It contributes to an understanding of life because in order to hope, you must decide what makes life meaningful in the first place." Hope, for Bilbo Baggins, is a quality within him that triumphs over adversity. In Irish mythology, so the story goes, when things fall apart, and the old beliefs no longer hold true, it is every adult's responsibility to go out to the edge of darkness and into the forest to find something true. You must bring it back and, all together, weave the tribe's story anew. Perhaps it's the half of me that's a Connemara woman²⁰ that makes this story work for me. I like the responsibility it places on my shoulders to find the thread of a

²⁰ My father was born in Connemara and when I visited my family in Ireland, in the 70s, they explained my ways by remarking to each other that indeed it was because I was half a Connemara woman.

new narrative and weave it with renewed vigor. I like the sense of community it evokes in knowing I'm not weaving alone. It gives me hope.

My sense that a hopeful pedagogy had a vital role to play in my research project revealed itself when the tide of excitement that accompanied the initial introduction of sociocratic governance turned to discomfort, despair and anger as things began to fall apart and the old beliefs no longer held true. As Kate explains in Chapter 7, it was all very well for me to sweep into the schools with a sense of hope but it didn't always cut it with my co-participants who didn't like me rocking the boat, or they did but they felt dragged down by the perceived resistance of others. So a pedagogy of hope played two important roles in my research project. First, it gave me the courage to introduce this kind of change into schools knowing that it would cause disruption and chaos. Second, and most importantly, it challenged me to find ways of speaking and being and doing that provided a sense of hope for my co-participants at a time when, for them, hope was firmly tied to maintaining order in an environment where they felt the constant threat of change. Van Manen (1990) describes this paradox in education as teachers speaking of doing hopeful work, in that they invest in a belief that what they *do* is going to influence children's lives for the better, but that the language used to describe their work has been purged of hope that prohibits *being* hopeful. "The language of aims and objectives, therefore, is a language of hopeless hope...to hope is to believe in possibilities" (pp. 122-123).

When I began my research project I knew I would hear *hopeless* talk. In the past I'd even participated in it. Hope is often a one-way street in schools, just as van Manen describes. I had confidence and trust in myself but not necessarily in others. I didn't think that my colleagues had what it took to become better teachers and they certainly couldn't take responsibility for themselves. I could do hope but not be it, and so, in the past, you might have heard me engage in conversations, with my co leaders like this:

They will never get it; *they* don't take any responsibility; *they* need to be told; *they* have no initiative; *they* are a hopeless lot; *they* have no idea how to program; *they* need to be told a dozen times; *they* wouldn't have a clue.

But don't think for a moment we were the only ones lacking in hope. When I walked out of the office and into my classroom I became a teacher again and then I could hit the ball back over the other side of the net by huddling with my teacher peers and claiming of the leadership team:

They should just tell us what to do; *they* treat us like children; *they* are hopeless; *they* don't communicate; *they* don't appreciate how hard teaching is; *they* give us no support.

If I was going to survive my research project I had to embrace hope with all my being and live it (Friere, 2001). I had to put myself in the background and believe in the goodness of others. I had to believe that everyone wanted to be the best they could be. I had to believe that hope would allow me to see the truth in the darkness of the forest and find where it fitted the authentic narrative of each school. Friere's life work, underpinned by a principle of hope, became my touchstone as I entered Beachlands Primary School to begin my research project. As you will see throughout my narrative, it was sometimes all I had.

Becoming Integral

What does it mean to have an integral world view? I was first introduced to integral philosophy on June 9th, 2008 when Dr Settlemaier, from the Faculty of Education, presented a lunch time seminar entitled, *Spiral Dynamics – Values Learning and Consciousness Development from an Integral Perspective*. It ignited another pathway for me to pursue as I tried to make meaning of the world of educational research, both in theory and practice. Integral theory provided me with a new way of seeing things and helped me explore the many paradoxes that were beginning to frustrate me as I grappled with each participant's ability to work beyond the traditional school structure. As McIntosh (2007, p. 74) so aptly puts it, I was "faced with a tug-of-war between traditionalism and postmodernism for the soul of the modernist majority" but it seems that my dilemmas were to be expected as natural life conditions of a developing integral consciousness. Like Adrienne (one of my co-participants at Forrester), who explains in Chapter 9 how she was able to go with the flow once she realized certain conditions *should* be expected, I could almost relax

knowing that it was just as it should be; a paradox, “an essential element of life itself” (Czarniawaska, 1997, p. 170).

As my understanding of integral consciousness developed, so too did my view of how I could use it to illuminate the way we worked to improve schools. I could see a need to allow for emerging understandings to be valued knowing that not everyone would be able to make meaning of what was happening equally or, certainly not, at the same time. McIntosh cautioned us “to find solutions that don’t require the whole world (school) to become postmodern in some kind of miraculous transformation” (p. 77) so I was challenged to think anew about the way the organization was evolving and whether or not we were taking individual consciousness into account (Kasl & Elias, 2000). Drawing on Kegan’s model of the structure of consciousness, I learned that as the system becomes more complex it provides the conditions for increased consciousness and less resistance to change, allowing us to flourish as individuals (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

The Open Space²¹ event I facilitated at both of my host schools revealed the complexity of the environment that teachers work in each day. In doing so the participants were energized and overwhelmed in equal parts. The challenge then was to seek ways to use the revealed knowledge to foster deeper understanding rather than taking the easy route of managing the issues to death. After analyzing the issues raised during an Open Space, I simplified Wilber’s 4 Quadrants of Integral Methodological Pluralism (IMP) to help school leaders see where their energies were directed in terms of school improvement versus what the system was actually demanding (Wilber, 2007). Wilber’s 4 quadrants address firstly the “I” which I interpreted as 1st person experiences; the subjective and singular person who can be viewed from the inside and the outside. In quadrant 2 is the “WE”; the intersubjective world of community. In quadrant 3 is the “IT”; the objective exterior, and the “ITS”; the interobjective exterior. Wilber suggested that “People can start to build this integral vision themselves by applying the four quadrants to whatever field they are in” (Wilber, 2000, pp. 266-267). I simplified the model by combining the “IT” and “ITS” in one sector, thereby clearly capturing the exterior landscape that

²¹ Refer to Glossary

schools often focus most of their energy on trying to manage. My version looked something like this when I applied it to the concept of the sociocratic circle meeting format. The Integral framework was useful in helping schools think about how to create holistic solutions to issues where, in the past, they would focus on getting the policy written, the plan in place, the timetable in order, as though the plan was the solution.

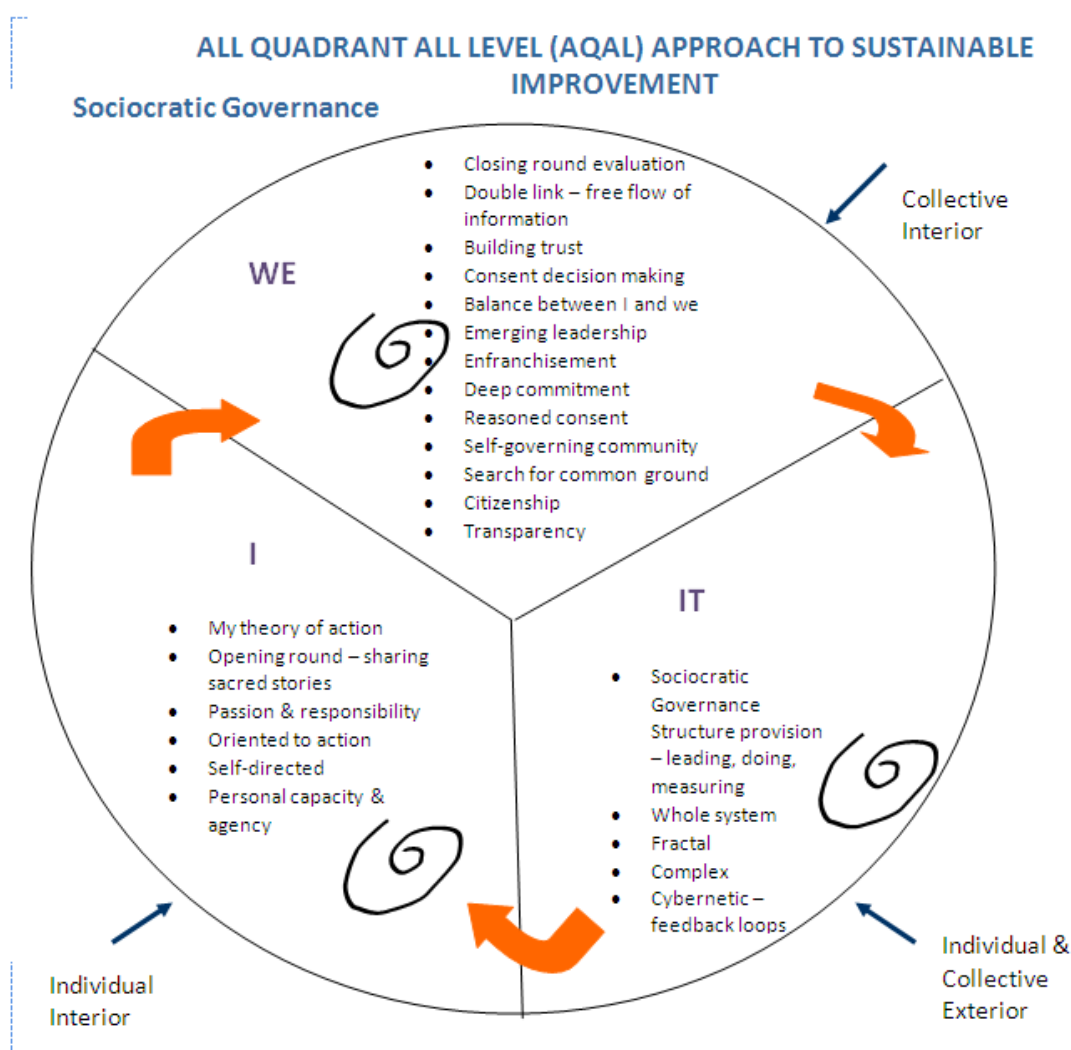


Figure Three: Using Integral philosophy to explore the depths of sociocratic governance.

My investigations into Integral philosophy led me to Wilber’s notion of vision-logic; “the integration of intellectual capacity with intuition” (cited in MacIntosh, 2007, p. 82) that seemed to value my gut feelings about school improvement. And from there, Integral philosophy looped me back to network theory. My world was

becoming more interconnected by the day. I began to see the school environment and everyone in it as objects connecting and acting on, rather than reacting to, conditions from within and without the organization. I began to picture a multi-dimensional map of the school that enabled all stakeholders to see what was really happening in the school as a “holistic, dynamic pattern of self-organizing processes that maintain themselves as stable configurations through their ongoing reproduction” (McIntosh, 2007, p. 247). I needed to find a way to represent both the inside and the outside of the school to help everyone really understand the complexity of the life-world that teachers inhabit. You’ll see the outcome of my thinking in Chapter 11.

Framed & (Mis)guided

It would seem that, despite the assurance by Eisenhart (2006) that my research question, *what happens when teachers are given greater opportunities to deliberate and make decisions about the work they do*, is the work of an interpretive researcher, I was, never-the-less, not immune to the paradigm wars that continue to simmer in some parts of the world (Preissle, 2006) as my research project unfolded. In the section above I *claim* that my research is a multi paradigmatic, auto-ethnographic study into a complex environment, viewed from the interpretive paradigm. However, as I grappled to understand the theories and paradigms that underpin my research, the power of other, more deeply embedded, world-views threatened to overwhelm my newly emerging ontology in unexpected ways. At times the gold standard of scientific inquiry would appear, like Mephistopheles waiting to capture my researcher’s soul, challenging my capacity to translate my passion and vision into practice without producing a “distorted project” (Eisenhart, 2010, p. 703).

And so, as I began to interpret and represent my data, a personal paradigm war gets underway and threatens to disarm me even while I am envisioning a different kind of metaphor to describe what I want the research space to be like. At this point, if you were a fly on the wall, this is what you will hear...

Hi, my name is Paula and I am a positivist.

Did that catch you by surprise! I hope that you know enough about me by now to be thrown by my claim but if not, read on:

Paula

You sure know how to string a few words together...your rhetorical style is very compelling.

Ok, seeing that you are so good let me ruffle your feathers a bit (as a critical friend).

The paper is in two parts.

The first is a densely rich review of the key literature in the field, but in the sense that the review is voiced by the literature (cf. an author)...the research context is missing and an epistemology of positivism prevails via propositional deductive logic and truth asserting. This is fine if it's what you intend, because it is done well. N'less, the one really jarring note is the unwarranted imperative on page 6 that "...schools must first redefine..."

The brief second section adds empirical fuel to the positivist bonfire, with the sudden emergence of the voice of God. Alleluia!

Ciao

Peter ☺

My beginning attempt at writing prompted the above critique from my supervisor that tipped me out of my warm cocoon of knowledge claims and sent me scrambling for my coat of multiple paradigms. He'd caught me out pulling the "God trick" (Harraway cited in Gilgun 2005, p. 258), even though I was quite unaware of it at the time of writing. I growled at the computer screen and muttered, "You know, that isn't what I meant!"

So, let's try it again:

Hi, my name is Paula and by conditioning I am a positivist.

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) consider that positivism and post positivism provide the backdrop for all other paradigms to operate, and as you can see I can attest to that. I've described, in my philosophy, how I claim to view the world as a complex and dynamic interaction of elements and yet, even as I make the claim, my scientific Lorelai²² is hard to resist as she compellingly sings me onto the rocks of reductionist thinking and strident knowledge claims. I am a neophyte in the world of multiple world-views (mine having been narrowed over a life-time of kow-towing to the constraints and rules of acceptable science) but I'm not alone. The grand narrative of scientific knowledge-the gold standard-persists as Loudon (2008, p. 359) describes how he adapts his research project (as a condition of funding) "to add a significant quantitative dimension to (his) project" despite winning a tender for the project based on case study skills and methods. In doing so, he presumably appeases the government official who tells him, "We don't want to know any more about the colour of the carpet".

In my research project, I am unable to ignore the carpet (although it's not the colour that's an issue but rather the entire lack of it) and, as I'm not constrained by promises of funding, I can't help feeling duty bound to "embrace a more capacious and disorderly conception of the scientific enterprise" (Schwandt, 2006, p. 809). Besides, sometimes knowing about the carpet gets to the heart of pedagogical dissonance in schools and how, by not drilling down to what is *really* stopping us from becoming a learning organisation, we often fail to act at the level where sustainable change can occur – the level of culture. So here's how carpet came to be significant in my organisational narrative and, by default, determined the theoretical framework of my research project.

Scenario

The seven members of the Learning Hub file into the boardroom, drinks in hand. They're grateful that lunch will be provided today; it's been a bit of a

²² in German legend a fairy similar to the Greek Sirens lived on the rock and by her singing lured the sailors to their death.

rush dismissing the kids to get here on time. As they take their seats the Principal tells them that information technology is on the *agenda*²³ today. He explains that a new policy initiative, developed by the Assistant Principal, is about to be introduced to staff, and two class-sets of notebook computers are on their way to the school - creating an urgent need to get students using computers. The conversation immediately reveals a yawning gap between the various Hub members: those who have been immersed in the technology for years and are excitedly looking forward to the opportunities that this latest initiative will provide, and the Luddites who have spent the last 20 years avoiding the very notion of computers in the classroom. The conversation unfolds...

Kate: So we need to work together to find ways to integrate IT into the daily work kids do. At the moment we have three computers each...

Maryanne: Well that's hopeless...how does that work?

Kate: Well, I don't know about anyone else but I have them up all the time and the kids go backwards and forwards when they need ...like when it's the best tool...

Maryanne: That won't work for me...kids going back and forth...too disruptive.

Kate: Ummm...I...the kids get used to it...they know how to do it. It works really well and

Decision making

Out of something came nothing...

Think of a problem

Think of a solution

Walk the line

Follow the rules, no looking forward

No looking back

Decide

Make it law...hard law.

Crush, defeat, dehumanise.

Out of nothing came something...

Imagine what if...

Feel the spiral of chaos

Weigh up the options,

There are no rules

Look forward, look backward

Deliberate, dialogue, connect,

Ah Ha!

Try it out...improve it...

Empower, enliven,

Figure Four

²³ I use the term agenda here only in the metaphorical sense. In reality an agenda that everyone contributed to and were aware of prior to the meeting never became a reality in the time I was at the school. It was recognised as imperative for general staff meetings but the transference wasn't made to the Learning Hub, despite many members complaining that they didn't know what would be discussed each week.

you're not trying to find a purpose to use
computers, it's a tool and the kids use it when it's the best tool.

Maryanne: That would be too noisy...my
floor is wooden and the noise is too much. If I was
going to get kids using computers I need carpet...
I need my room to be carpeted.

At that point the conversation stalls, the bell rings and the Learning Hub
members file back to class leaving the question of carpet hanging in the air.

(transcription of observation notes taken during meeting, August, 2008)

The purpose of raising the question of carpet in the Year 1 classroom now is to explain how the messiness of organisational life could not be described by anything other than a multi paradigmatic approach. While it may be expedient for Loudon (2008) to adapt his methodology in the face of funding issues, the pressure I feel comes from a different source: from Hostetler (2005) who urges that I consider how my research might contribute to human well-being, and from Howe (2009) who suggests that my research is value-laden and therefore in need of a different kind of science that will help me reveal other world-views and explore revelations throughout my research project that may otherwise remain hidden (Belzer & St. Clair, 2005).

Making Judgements: How Might you Decide the Worth of this Research Project?

By taking on a research project that didn't follow a prescribed pathway I could be exposing myself to ridicule from those who measure educational research in objective terms. There's no point, therefore, in asking you to judge the validity of my claims in traditional terms or to expect that I can convince you that it could be transferred across sites – at this point I don't believe it can, at least not in a rubber stamp kind of way. The standards that I wish my research to be judged against are, like the theories that underpin it, still emerging and up for discussion (Torrance, 2008). However as an interpretive auto-ethnographer I stand to benefit from the high quality work of interpretive researchers, mentioned below, who have gone before me

in that my thesis can bask in the reflected standards that have been developed out of their work. I trust this thesis does justice to their scholarship as I make claim to the quality standards of trustworthiness and authenticity through exploring the subjective meaning of my life world whilst calling on others to explore it with me.

I intend for you to hear my critical, reflexive voice as I consciously explore my praxis as a facilitator of change (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008). You should notice a change in me as I learn about myself and transform through my interactions with Other. By representing my research as a narrative inquiry the standards of verisimilitude and pedagogical thoughtfulness should be apparent to the reader. In keeping with the standards of Integral philosophy you should witness both the system emerging as well as my understanding of it as I struggle to bring a sense of connectedness and holism to my experience of complexity. Complexity theory “compels a realisation that there are no universal truths” (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 34) therefore it is in keeping with the methodology that you will see both the author and my co-participants choosing metaphorical structures to understand and respond to the emergent realities of a system under change. Considering the validity of my research I also call on three of Lather’s (1993) four subtypes of validity as referents, particularly in Chapter 4. Whenever I concerned myself with problems of representation (ironic validity), difference and uncertainty (paralogical validity), and ethical considerations, as I practice be(com)ing an embodied, self-reflexive facilitator of change (voluptuous validity), Lather’s transgressive validity helped me act towards moving our current institutions “to some other place of social inquiry” (p. 676).

The vastness of the field of qualitative inquiry means that there are no core standards for me to call on that have been readily agreed upon by all (Torrance, 2008). The quality standards mentioned here, therefore, are by no means complete and you may well recognise others according to your experience of multi-paradigmatic research design. I encourage you to apply them alongside mine, thereby assisting me in becoming a valuable contributor to an area of educational research in the making.

Praxis

A key element of my research design leans towards the notion of praxis as I explored my understanding of what it means to facilitate change. My way of knowing is explored throughout my research and is continually informed by new knowledge. Despite that, I don't always see the power relations or whose interests are being served; in that respect, I am still under construction (Pereira, L, 2007). You will notice that I begin with a vision of what I believe schools are capable of becoming and my vision is re-imagined throughout the process of facilitating change as I learn more about the implications of emergence. I become an agent of change and work towards emancipating others to find their critical voice.

Verisimilitude & Pedagogical Thoughtfulness

Ellis (2004) considers that, as an auto-ethnographer, concerns about the validity of my research should address verisimilitude; whether it evokes in my readers a sense that what has happened here is real and believable. The dialogic quality of my text should engage the reader in considering their own pedagogy, experiences, values and dilemmas and open up the possibility for dialogue within their own organisations (van Manen, 1991). Evidence of pedagogical thoughtfulness is practised throughout my project as I ask myself how I should be and how should I act with my co-participants (van Manen, 1990).

Connectedness & Holism

Integral theory considers that validity claims for each quadrant (I, we, it/its) are different in that they are grounded in different realities. Because they are different they can help connect different ways of knowing into a holistic and collective "truth" (Wilber, 2000). In considering the claims of each quadrant I was confronted with the need to look beyond current thinking and embrace a more holistic way of knowing about the world, and my place in it, from subjective, intersubjective and inter objective positioning (Davis & Sumara, 2006). Considering multiple realities then called to mind Richardson's 'crystal-as-metaphor' in establishing validity as it describes the way in which knowledge can be viewed from multiple perspectives. In considering there is no single truth, Richardson says '...crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic.' (cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 181).

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

In addressing further concerns, the legitimacy of this research fits within the authenticity criteria, developed by Guba and Lincoln (cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), that assess the goodness of Fourth Generation Evaluation (4GE) as an integral component of constructivist case study. The authors believe the criteria are the ‘hallmarks of authentic, trustworthy, rigorous, or “valid” constructivist or phenomenological inquiry’ (cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 180). Each of the criteria recognises value pluralism and the commitment to seek out and communicate different constructs, features that are evident in my research. In claiming fairness I have honoured the constructs of all stakeholders and identified them as they wished to be identified. You will see how I have openly negotiated the recommendations and subsequent action to be taken by my co-participants and myself as a critical aspect of my research design. The extent to which my experience of the world improved, matured, expanded and elaborated will demonstrate ontological authenticity, and the many opportunities for my co-participants to be confronted with, understand and appreciate the constructs of others will be demonstrated through the process of implementing the sociocratic meeting structure, thereby demonstrating educative authenticity. Catalytic and tactical authenticity will be evident as you see my co-participants and myself become empowered to act on our emerging understandings about the nature of decision making and how each of us was able to improve the work we did.

Considerations of trustworthiness can be seen embedded throughout my research report. Credibility is addressed, to some extent, in the section on ethics where I discuss how I attended to member checks, prolonged engagement, fairness and persistent observation. Peer debriefing was an integral element of my emergent research design as my co-participants and I acted out the process of our progressive subjectivity. You will notice that I constantly question my constructs, recognise when I get stuck and I am alert to discovering new ways of knowing and understanding (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In traditional research design, dependability is measured by the stability of the design, something that I can hardly claim here. Again I call on Guba and Lincoln (1989) to support my unconventional inquiry by pointing out that they consider emergent design as a “hallmark(s) of maturing-and successful-inquiry” (p. 242). The test is in the trail I have laid for readers to track the

changes in my thinking and decision making. My use of Integral philosophy is but one of the methods I used to capture my changing and shifting constructions. Each method will help outside reviewers explore and track the process so that the quality of my decisions can be judged by understanding the factors that led to at least some of the complex decisions that were made throughout the life of the project (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Validity for an Emancipatory Interest

In order to measure the validity of a research project, traditional methodology stripped away context by statistically and physically controlling variables. But, as Guba and Lincoln (1989) advise, “that cannot be the paradigm of choice” (p. 60); it certainly wasn’t for me. On the other hand, the vast expansiveness of a postmodern world, without a fixed objective reality, seemed to render discussions of validity invalid. And yet, as Tomlinson (1989) points out (and you will see me refer to it numerous times throughout my project), my investment in a ‘commonsense’ reality subscribes to an objective understanding of the world, so where did that leave me in trying to establish the validity of my endeavours? As Creswell and Miller predict, I am becoming “increasingly perplexed in attempting to understand the notion of validity in qualitative inquiry” (2000, p.124).

If I consider that decision making leading to collaborative action is central to my research design then Lather (1986) aids my thinking by suggesting that I am “advance(ing) emancipatory theory-building through the development of interactive and action-inspiring research” (p. 64). As a methodology, therefore, Lather proposed that I must demonstrate that my co-participants were involved in the planning, execution and dissemination of my research; characteristics modelled on Freirian principles of emancipation and empowerment. My initial research design was not a collaborative effort but from the moment I entered each school its evolution was enacted collaboratively between myself and my co-participants, and by so doing we created a “validity of knowledge in process” (Reason & Rowan, 1981, p. 250), or as Lather (1993) puts it, methodology as practice. Lather’s “framing” of validity, born out of a self identified obsession with unmasking the methodological assumptions of post structural research design, provides a schema for determining the validity of my research methodology (p. 676). Under the heading, Transgressive Validity, Lather

(1993) identifies four sub types of validity, aspects of which are evident throughout the practice and representation of my research: validity as simulacra/ironic validity, Lyotardian paralogy/neo-pragmatic validity, Derridean rigour/rhizomatic validity and voluptuous validity/situated validity.

Validity as simulacra/ironic validity is concerned with “resisting the hold of the real and to foreground radical unknowability” (p. 677) by taking into account the crisis of representation. Throughout my project I reveal my awkwardness and anxiety in trying to know the unknowable, particularly concerning my relationships to my co-participants, as described in Chapter 4. Lyotardian paralogy/neo-pragmatic validity is demonstrated in my research project when you see me value difference, contradiction and multiple realities. Rather than seeking consensus, Lyotardian principles recognise complexity and a commitment to destabilising a fixed notion of reality “via the constant search for new ideas and concepts” (Lather, 1993, p. 679).

The third subtype of validity discussed by Lather, and evident throughout my research project, recognises the application of network theory as an alternative to organisational hierarchies. It recognises the tangled web of connections and relationships that are revealed when we begin to look closely at any complex system. Called Derridean rigour/rhizomatic validity by Lather, it is situated on the knife edge between business-as-usual and transformation, utilizing the language of possibility. According to Lather, Derridean rigour/rhizomatic validity is demonstrated by texts that ask questions. “Such a text signals tentativeness and partiality in decentering expert authority and moving towards practices of co-theorizing” (p. 681).

Finally, voluptuous validity/situated validity recognises an embodied, feminist way of knowing and engaging with the world. Establishing validity from this perspective requires the researcher to practice deep engagement in the field and self-reflexivity. Again it promotes adherence to incompleteness, partiality and “the creation of space for others to enter” (Lather, p. 682), features that you will witness throughout my research.

Lather’s four subtypes of validity has given me a deeper understanding of how I might lay claim to rigour whilst exploring the oftentimes turbulent sea of emergent

research. As with ethics, traditional discourses about the nature of validity “appear no longer adequate to the task” (p. 683). Lather offers Transgressive Validity as a way of exploring possibilities that were not possible under traditional conceptualisations of reality; a space that she calls “between the no longer and the not yet” (p. 683).

Conclusion

My exploration of multiple paradigms is, admittedly, a beginner’s struggle for greater understanding and a long over-due foray into a more natural, complex and intuitive epistemology (Fine, 2007). As you’ll see throughout my research project, despite my protestation to the contrary, a thin veil of positivism continues to drape over me each time I return to the school environment. You’ll likely see me peer into the dark nooks and crannies caused by its omnipresent shadow and jump at the power of its hegemonic ghosts. I’ll forget to seek different realities that lurk unseen, at least by my eyes (Berliner, 2006) and I’ll imagine myself as the omniscient narrator of a life world so familiar to me that I can do it with one hand tied behind my back.

Seeking out and exploring new ways to interpret the commonplace space of a school environment is my moral and ethical response to these obvious limitations that continue to haunt me. I am not, however, immune to the reality of views held in the scientific community that my research might not be considered “great” by my peers and, despite McClintock’s (2007) advice, will simply add to the flab in educational research. Disparaging remarks, it seems, come with the territory of qualitative research (Hill, 2006). In my case they came after a presentation that I was invited to give to my peers at my university.

Polite applause concluded my presentation. I was nervous about sharing my writing out of context because I know how it looks when you don’t put the theory around it. I took a chance because I wanted to see if the stories worked; if they had verisimilitude for my peers. Later, after we’d all gone back up to the PhD room, the feedback was more positive but, before that, the professor who organised the presentation asked me about my stories and

why I wanted to write narrative. I gave what was obviously a weak explanation because he wrinkled up his nose and grimaced at me.

“Yes, but don’t you think there’s just a bit too much of all that now!”

At the time, of course, I had no prepared defence but it would seem that I was being admonished for “‘leaky’ or ‘runaway’ practices...(I was) going too far” (Lather, 1993, p. 682). Never-the-less, it is my hope that by co-creating and narrating a process by which schools can transform via “an ethos of support” and high expectation, in school and out (Mezirow 1981, p.19), I can provide a sustainable pathway for schools to determine their own futures within the reality of both internal and external pressures and conditions. I acknowledge that, while high-stakes testing might be re-emerging as the policy of choice in schools, “...our children lead nested lives” that are highly resistant to reductionist theories aimed at improving student performance (Berliner, 2006, p. 951). At the heart of my research design lies a desire to “educate, empower and emancipate” (Jones, 2008, p. 220) educators out of the constraints of a dualist world view by educating, empowering and emancipating myself.

As the onus eventually falls to the reader of auto-ethnography to judge its worth, I shall leave you here to ponder its value as I consider the construction of the next chapter where I discuss the dilemma of representation in auto-ethnography.

Chapter 3: The 3Rs: Relationships, rapport and representation

Introduction

I asked myself, what about me? What is my cultural problem? In what way am I torn between two incompatible beliefs?

Barbery, *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, 2009, p. 257

The decision to devote an entire chapter to the question of representation is a conscious act on my part to explore, what are for me, some of the more baffling aspects of auto-ethnographic research, and to try to seek ways to ethically represent myself and others in my project. I am guided, in my quest, by Lincoln (2010) who encourages qualitative researchers to “work the hyphen”, as espoused by Fine (1994), to make our research relationships clear and transparent and to explore the part rapport and identity play in generating our data. In this chapter I will explore the many roles I and my co-participants *played* in the research field and the identities we took on, and how each impacted on our relationships and, ultimately, on what we were able to do (Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008).

Throughout this research project I have co participated and written myself into becoming someone who I was not, at least at the outset; a person “constituted by different ‘voiced positions’” (Raggatt, P, 2007, p. 355). In attempting to answer the question that still troubles me-whether the presence of this *newly minted* person would have been a better starting point for my research-the answer is made a little less harsh by the recollection of some wise words that described a PhD as an apprenticeship. Thankfully, that expression of my work has allowed me some succour as I look back with embarrassment at the person/s who entered Beachlands Primary School. As Hytten (2006) explains, my tools were forged from my current view of the world and, therefore were, “partial and limited” (p. 444). What I learnt from that first, clumsy and naïve exploration into the world of educational research has given me the eyes to see the Other, not as a reflection of my imagination but as a complex collection of multiple identities also in the process of becoming; competing identities, at times mediated by various allegiances and loyalties.

Placing relationships central to engaging in educational change challenges me to proceed with greater caution, humility and an awareness of the Other. It calls on me to consider the impact that positioning has on our conceptions of ourselves and our ability to come to shared understandings about the work we do together.

Some of the stories I tell throughout my project, about my relationships in the field, could be considered “bad stories”-stories of the uninvited guest who *plays up*-but they are just as important as the “good stories” as they help me “re-view what has been and re-imagine what could be” (Fine, Weis, Weseen & Wong, 2000, p. 126) in undertaking educational research, and indeed, in developing any relationship with the Other. By revealing the shifting relationships and the dilemmas they posed, I hope my narration of events will be the richer for it as I step out from behind “a false veil of neutrality and disembodiment” (Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008, p. 136) into the glare of becoming a plural and more complex self. I hope, also, that the representations of myself and Other will be accepted here as unfinished and incomplete stories about equally unfinished and incomplete beings brought into existence by my ever emerging, but limited, understanding of human interactions and relationships (Etherington, 2004).

Relationships

Once The Principal made the decision to take on my research project, the tangle of relationships at Beachlands Primary School kicked in. The implementation and consequences of my research project, so seemingly straightforward on paper, challenged me to consider many things that I had not considered prior to my entry into the field. On the *outside* the relationships seemed to be clearly defined and relatively static but once *inside* each relationship seemed to expand in proportion, to vie for attention and to test the ethical promises I had made. I wanted to be able to take myself seriously as an education researcher so that meant taking on a different kind of role in schools than I was used to; no longer *just* the teacher but an equal, on equal footing with the perceived decision makers. Perhaps I even subconsciously saw myself as gaining the status that had been denied me as a ‘mere’ teacher. I’d finally get access to those leadership team meetings that, in my former role, I had been excluded from. Suddenly I had access to people from whom I could get great

data (Fine, 1994), access that was denied to others in the school, so my use or misuse of that information could provide great insight or potentially do great harm. I will attempt here to describe some of the relationships at my first school and how my positioning changed and impacted on those relationships in an iterative and ever shifting pattern of interactions.

Beachlands Primary School: The Principal, The Deputy and Me

It's complicated, so bear with me while I try to untangle the knots that historically bind these relationships. The Deputy in this story is my closest friend and confidant. At the time of preparing for my PhD project she was working at a university so her interest in my work was as a friend and sounding board, nothing more. She had initially introduced me to the Principal many years before, when, after years of teaching at the same school and a brief stint at separate schools, she convinced me to apply for a job where she was The Deputy. The Principal was, well, The Principal. She clearly saw something in him, both as a leader and a friend that I did not. Nevertheless, the prospect of working closer to home and having a close collegial relationship in the workplace was highly appealing to me. I applied for and got the job.

My relationship with The Principal was fraught from the start and I would not have developed a closer relationship with him had it not been mediated by The Deputy. We socialized occasionally, his family and mine, but, at school, his extreme mood changes drove me crazy. One minute he was the BOSS, calling me into his office to sanction me for some perceived disobedience, and another the colleague, feet up on the desk, discussing an educational issue with humour and wit. The Deputy, however, felt a great sense of loyalty to him and protected him from any negative fallout from the difficult relationships he had with, not only me, but most of his staff. During the more trying times, when my frustration at his antics boiled over, she would say to me, "Oh he's ok. He's fine!" At times, I questioned her loyalty to me. At the end of 2005 The Deputy and I both left the school, and The Principal, behind, and that should probably have been that.

Late in 2006 I began casting my net about to find a school in which to try out my new-found skills as a facilitator of Open Space Technology. I figured that if any

staff could benefit from participating in a positive, proactive day of professional development my *old* colleagues could. I contacted The Principal and put the plan to him. The day went ahead as I expected, active and engaging, and both The Principal and staff gave it the 2 thumbs up. Mid-way through 2007 The Principal contacted me to tell me that he had been appointed to Beachlands Primary School and, as his introduction to the school in July, he wanted me to hold an Open Space Event. Again the day was relaxed and constructive and the Principal was able to interact with his new staff in an open and friendly manner.

My initial relationship with The Principal was, I'm sure you'd agree, difficult, so you'd be forgiven for wondering what I was thinking by considering doing my project at his school. But, as you can see, my position and therefore my relationship with him had changed through the more recent kind of work we did together and I felt that we had moved to a different kind of footing where my role and his had become more equitable. I felt comfortable with the new rapport we had developed. This time our relationship had evolved through our own interactions, not mediated by The Deputy, and I was able to be a more comfortable and *real* version of myself.

Fast forward to the end of 2007 and planning for my research project was well under way. I wanted to find a school where decision making could be explored using a different governance model; Beachlands and The Principal seemed like the obvious choice. And so it all was supposed to go. There is no knowing what might have occurred if our relationship had continued to develop on its own terms but, almost overnight, The Deputy had accepted a position at Beachlands and, suddenly my research project became exposed; I was not sure to what but I knew something had changed that would impact on everything. The reappearance of The Deputy on the scene shifted everything onto a completely different footing and ultimately led to the breakdown of my relationship with The Principal. The Deputy will tell you her own version of the story in Chapter 7 but for now it is important to note how her sudden appearance at the school threw me into a dilemma. Her prior relationship with The Principal impacted, not only on me, but on her co Deputy, who was also new to the school. Each of us struggled to find our place.

Communication changed dramatically. Where I had communicated directly with The Principal before The Deputy arrived I now found that information about the project was delivered and requested through her. I didn't know how to respond. Should I call or email The Principal directly? Should I bypass The Deputy and just keep my project between myself and The Principal? What impact would these decisions make on my relationship with The Deputy? Then again, through my interviews, I had access to information that the leadership team did not have and that began to challenge my understanding of ethics and what I had imagined ethics to be in my research project.

On one occasion, I was reminded of a situation described by Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong, (2000, p. 115) where participants consented to be part of their research because they saw the researcher as having the power to get a "counter-narrative out". It was after a Learning Hub meeting where The Principal was *banging on* about the ultimate importance of gathering empirical data to improve student performance. The teachers at the meeting sat in silence, accepting what had become a normative conversation. I raised a few questions and The Principal and I engaged in, what I thought of at the time, as professional dialogue; each of us expressing our views openly. Afterwards, The Coordinator²⁴ sought me out:

Coordinator: Hey, Paula...I've just been talking to Rebecca. We can't believe how you just challenged The Principal!

Paula: Huh? Oh...you mean..you mean the data thing?

Coordinator: Yeah...God, no one goes there with him...It's his baby. We're all laughing at you for saying that. You're very brave! Hahaah!

Paula: Hahaha! Yeah....

(Personal journal entry, June, 2009)

I walked away, puzzled and disturbed. Did some of the people at the school see me as their agent who could speak publicly where they could not; as the person able to hold conversations about things that they could not; someone able to tell a counter-narrative to the current story that was being told? I needed to think more deeply

²⁴ The Coordinator is the person in a school who drives professional learning. They are often a classroom teacher who has been identified as an exemplary practitioner.

about this dilemma and, as someone who learns through talk, I needed to think aloud to someone about it; but who?

As friends and colleagues, The Deputy and I often discussed issues concerning education, the work we did and the people we worked with. Now everything seemed to be off limits. Now we circled each other; Suspicion and Doubt uncomfortable comrades who shadowed us each time we met. The Deputy had not formally consented to be part of my research project, and yet she could not avoid being involved in it. I became self-conscious in conversations, aware of Stacey's contention that everything that was said could become "grist for the ethnographic mill" (as cited in Gluck & Patai, 1991, p.113). On one occasion we were sitting on the couch, having a glass of wine together and she began to talk about the difficulties she was having at school. Wow! This was gold and I didn't want to lose it. I asked if I could record the conversation. You know what happened don't you? I'll save us all a painful experience by not going into detail, it's enough to say that the role of researcher began to overwhelm me and blind me to the need to protect my friendship, at all costs. It was a mistake I never made again but I was left wondering what information I *could* gather. What had my co-participants *really* consented to? Perhaps they didn't know what they didn't know and neither did I. The Deputy was part of my research project because she played a significant role in the organisation of the school; she knew I was going to be there when she took the job. Did I need to shoulder all of the responsibility of trying to work out how this would unfold?

My relationships and how I worked them became my overwhelming focus; I lay awake at night, I worried and fretted, I became angry at the difficulties that had arisen. I hadn't planned it this way and it seemed so unfair that events beyond my control had turned my project on its head. Introducing a new governance model became secondary to working the hyphen between myself and 'Other', and eventually it became too much. My friendship with The Deputy became increasingly strained. I went into my research project with pedagogy of hope (Palmer, 2004; Giroux, 1997). I went into it believing in the goodness of people; I had faith that each of us would desire to do the best we could and be the best we could be, despite outward appearances. Where, in a former life, I might have joined my friend in talking about how hopeless teachers were and how little self efficacy they showed,

now there was a new quietness in me; I wanted to be something else in this space²⁵. I wanted to turn the spotlight back on myself and ask what part I had played, and continued to play, in promoting the powerlessness of teachers. I wanted to explore what part I could play in their emancipation. I was no longer the person I had once been in this friendship and the cracks began to widen. It seems that prior to entering the field I had not heeded Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont's warning (2003, p. p. 53) that (in qualitative research) "...experiences in the field cannot help but be personal and emotional.

And then there was The Principal who increasingly made decisions about the implementation of the governance model that was in direct conflict with how it *needed* to be implemented in order to be successful. One of the key features of sociocracy, as opposed to business-as-usual, is that all roles in the restructured organisation are elected by the appropriate peer group. When we set up the Learning Hub it was with that understanding, discussed on many occasions beforehand. So, imagine my surprise when The Deputy told me that The Principal had appointed (anointed?) certain people to the Learning Hub, one of them his daughter²⁶. I knew then that this would end in tears. From that moment on I began to tread as if on eggshells, my way of being in the school tempered by the knowledge that at any moment I could take a wrong step, but even that didn't save me from falling over the cliff.

As an agent of change entering the research field, I was at once a friend, a colleague, a teacher and a researcher, a woman, a human being, a mother and a sister. I was a daughter too and, as with all of these roles, I brought with me different ways of knowing and understanding the world; each could see or not see, could feel or not feel, could empathise or not empathise. Each had a different capacity to work the hyphen and develop rapport between myself and "Other". The position I thought I would take in the research field (what position was that again?) was simplistically

²⁵ This new quietness reveals itself in many ways and allows me to move beyond an 'either-or' position. One day, in the middle of writing this chapter, I went downstairs to eat lunch with my university colleagues. As we sat together around the table, a professor announced that she was going to do a quantitative unit the following year; no need to go into her reasoning but what she did say that confounded me was that qualitative research was easy! I allowed myself a quiet smile where once only a counter claim would suffice. I can now live with paradoxical thinking and do my work within the constraints of multiple conditions where once my view of the world had to prevail.

²⁶ A year 6 teacher

conceived out of the reading and study I had done prior to constructing my research proposal. Were their other warnings out there that I didn't heed? Was this a case of having to experience something before really coming to know it? Did I really think the researcher "I" was going to be "a stable and continuous point of consciousness" (Raggatt, 2007, p. 356)?

The embedded rapport I subconsciously imagined between myself and other teachers (I had been a teacher for 33 years) and between the endowed leadership team (I was experienced in the way of schools and had been a teacher leader) certainly offered me no easy entrée into that world and so the work of building rapport began. Depending on the role I played and the kind of information I sought or hoped to provide, I was a different person for each of my co-participants, so my emerging relationships with them demanded that I seek a personally constructed response. I could not rely on my role as a teacher or colleague to see me through. I was unaware at the time that my narrated self, constructed out of a specific history and point in time, had far more work to do in establishing rapport than I had imagined (Raggatt, 2007).

So too, the relationships that various staff members, past and present, had with each other also impacted on how I was able to do my work. There was nothing simple or straightforward about these individuals or how they interacted (Raggatt, 2005). Old allegiances and hidden hurts affected the degree of trust in the group and no amount of work on my part was going to reveal those relationships or heal them in the short term; try as I might.

Rapport

By the time I entered my 3rd project school (not included in this thesis) I had learnt enough about relationships, and the kind of "I" I had to work at being each time I met with my co-participants, to be able to celebrate the intimacy of rapport. But, in my first school I was neither an insider nor an outsider and yet, at times, I felt both the familiarity and strangeness of being in both places at once. I was concerned with playing the part of the professional researcher who worries about tainting the research by being over familiar with my co-participants; by developing closer

relationships than I perhaps should (Atkinson, Coffey & Delamont, 2004). And yet, this place *was* my place, these people *were* my people and my purpose for being here was to facilitate an exploration into making the conditions that we worked under better for everyone.

I expected the work of building rapport with some of the teachers would be relatively easy. They would be the teachers who understood the project and asked questions if they didn't. They would be the teachers who wanted to improve the decision making processes, who wanted a greater stake in making decisions about conditions and issues that impacted on their work. I also expected that some relationships would be difficult to establish, especially because The Principal alone had made the decision to introduce the new governance model into the school. In reality, that meant everyone would be part of the *experiment* whether they chose to be part of my research or not. Exploring my praxis as a facilitator of change was an important aspect of my research so building rapport with the *difficult* people was an expected challenge. I knew that some people wouldn't like the different way of meeting, I expected resistance from advocates of traditional ways of doing things as the only way (Dewey, 1938), and I relished the opportunity to learn and grow as a facilitator of change. That didn't mean I wasn't nervous and anxious each time we met. I certainly was. Because I wanted to be a different person to the one I was as a teacher, I had to learn how to do that. I had done the study and now it was time to put it into practice and learn my craft on the job.

As my rapport with my closest friend and confidant and The Principal spiralled into decline, other relationships flourished under the different roles I played in the school. Like Craig...

Craig initially made me nervous. Male teachers always seem to have this chilled out attitude to teaching so I figured I'd be in Craig's bad books for introducing an initiative that might mean more work. Male teachers have a special status in a primary school; they get away with murder! Craig was friendly enough but, initially, didn't volunteer to be interviewed. During one staff meeting session early on he made a bit of a song and dance about me wandering the room after I'd set the groups to work on some evaluation or other. He looked up as I wandered towards his group,

“Woooh, look out, we’d better get to work...here comes the PhD!” Laughter and collusion, the group put their heads down and bonded closer.

I came here as an insider (I thought), a fellow teacher and, for the first time I felt pushed outside the group. As expected, he was taking the piss...²⁷

A few weeks later Craig surprised me. During a weekly staff meeting, a VIP from the system education office came to visit. It was all very stiff and formal although the group still met seated in a circle; confronting in itself and usually the first thing to revert back in stressful times. The VIP was introduced and gave his customary pat on the head to the teachers for their devotion and there was a moment of awkward silence as everyone eyed each other as to what might go next. The VIP asked if anyone had anything to say. Craig spoke up. “Mr VIP, you might like to know that we’ve introduced a very special initiative here...”

VIP: Yes...marvellous...what else is happening here?

Craig: We meet and make decisions in a different way. You might like to know about...

VIP: Good, good...

It was clear to all of us sitting there that he had little interest in what Craig had to say. The awkward silence gave way to the Principal’s nervous, “Hrrrrrrmph...errr. I’d like to call on The Deputy to thank...” The VIP made a hasty exit as the teachers rolled their eyes at each other and let out a collective sigh...

²⁷ To *take the piss* is a slang expression meaning to mock, tease, ridicule or scoff. It is a derivation of the Cockney rhyming slang, *take the mickey bliss*.

The Researcher, the Teacher and Me

Seriously, I don’t know where to begin...

I set the camera up to capture just their head and shoulders
Like I’d seen on TV
I check the battery in my recorder and say aloud, “Hello, hello...”

Rewind

I nervously look around in case someone hears me for what I am

Imposter!

Seriously, I don’t know where to begin...

I sit in the circle with them to introduce the governance model
Can’t they see I’m on their side?
I’m one of you, I want to say but instead I come out with, “I’ve been teaching for years...still do...so I know what it’s like!”
Now they’ll accept me.

I scan the room nervously hoping they don’t see through me

Imposter!

Seriously, I don’t know where to begin...

How can I just be?

Me

Figure Five

Craig came looking for me afterwards. “Can you believe that!” He said. “So bloody typical! They don’t want to know anything...I’ve been meaning to tell you...I thought this whole idea...you know, the meeting changing and how it was going to be..I thought it would be just another thing we had to do but I keep thinking now; this is just what I’ve been waiting for!

(from personal conversation and notes taken at meeting, May, 2008).

The subsequent rapport that Craig and I developed cohered around this event. Our initial caginess towards each other was born out of the context and experiences of our individual histories and they impacted on our initial meeting, the way we related to each other, and the way we interpreted the world. Craig taught me to question the stereotypes I had about people and to be braver about my role as a leader of change. My initial preconceptions about Craig were wrong but they could have continued to remain right for me had he not made the first move. Craig left Beachlands Primary School mid-way through the first year of my project to take up a position in the Middle East. Our conversations about educational change and his interest in what was happening at his old school continued as we became friends on Facebook and I came to know him as an educator who in no way resembled my initial conception of him.

As I reflect back on my perceptions of my co-participants and those participants who did not elect to be interviewed and with whom I had no intimate conversations I question my ability to represent them truthfully; for what is a true representation of another when I cannot even tell you who *I* am. My challenge, according to Smith (1999), is to try and cast a bright light on the experiences of all.

Representation

Here, Gilgun (2005, p. 260) throws down the gauntlet by informing me that my role as a researcher includes “the task of figuring out how to represent ourselves and other human beings in the most full and accurate way possible”. My desire to fulfil that obligation determined that I narrate my research project as an Auto-ethnography and use multiple genres to represent what happened in the hope that my readers will

find it “interesting and memorable” and, therefore, “consistent with good science” (Gilgun, 2005, p. 257).

My choices, however, did make me question, not only how I should represent myself and “Other”, but who of our multiple selves would appear in this text and what we would be like. In choosing I am also not choosing. I could tell you a whitewashed version of myself who thought of everything before going into my schools to *get the data*. I could remain *ethically cleansed* and tell you that it all went beautifully. Or I could *really* tell you what I happened, acknowledging that my reality may not collude with other versions of the same event (Van Maanen, 1988).

Considering that my research question is: *What **happens** when teachers are given greater opportunities to deliberate and make decisions about the work they do?* I figure I am bound to at least try and tell my truth and the truth according to others. The whole point of my research project was to explore the emerging stories that come out of organisational change that we might learn from them. But how should those stories be told? *Should* they be told at all and, if so, who should tell them? What is allowed to be said? Who can say it? How do I represent myself and who do I call on to represent the “Other”? Whose voices should be heard and whose silenced? (Fine, Weis, Weseen & Wong, 2000).

The decision, of course, is mine and in making it I take full responsibility for the choices I have made. The way in which I represent myself and ‘Other’ shapes my inquiry but you will see throughout my project report that the “implications of simultaneously engaging in cultural critique and engaging others” was a constant complication (Springwood & King, 2001, p. 406). I wanted to be able to tell a collaborative tale where teachers participated in creating a dialogic and democratic space for organisational learning to occur but what I often got was resistance “confrontation, prevarication, obfuscation, disagreement...” (Springwood & King, 2001, p. 405). The question I then posed to myself was: do I hide the more unpleasant aspects of engagement and only tell the hopeful tales that reveal our good sides? Realistically, I could not. The pathological aspects of relationships that arose when exploring *What happens* in giving teachers greater opportunities to make decisions became both the source of resistance and the fuel to fire up the need for

educational leaders (and myself) to develop their/my capacity to deal with difficult people.

I have attempted to overcome some aspects of the “crisis of representation”, as mentioned by Marcus and Fischer (1999, p. 7), knowing that my success will depend on your interpretation of my motives. I will tell both the flattering and the less flattering aspects of what emerged in this research, especially with reference to relationships. I do so, not from the standpoint of claiming power over those who struggled with my presence in the field, but as a person who, no matter what role I played, desired to understand myself better and thereby know the “Other”. My standpoint, in representing “Other”, is hopefully self-reflexive but I didn’t start out that way. In living the theory into practice I can now accept that the deficit in the relationships lies with me and challenges me to ask of myself: what is it you are not seeing? What do you need to explore within yourself to make this relationship work?

Conclusion

In contemplating the part of relationship, rapport and representation in Auto-ethnographic inquiry I conclude by extending an invitation for you to vicariously participate in my research (Gilgun, 2005). View any omissions or exclusions not as mistakes but as opportunities for you, my readers, to narrate yourself into the story as characters with new perspectives to add that may not be represented here. Join with me in dynamically co creating the many complementary or divergent tales that might come out of organisational change where power differentials mediate all interactions making it impossible for me to claim to be either a social or historical all-rounder (Kincheloe & McLaren, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Lincoln (2010, p. 6), suggests that questioning how “we can collect, add to, and accumulate knowledge” is an important consideration in qualitative research and to that end my desire is that my research will not be a stand-alone structure or even a brick in the wall of understanding organisational change. If this research has any value at all it will be in providing a place to explore different conceptions of how qualitative research can be acted out by all participants in an ever evolving journey of discovery to improve the way our schools work. The relationships we develop through co participating are a

critical aspect of that evolution. In Parts 4 and 5 you can see for yourself how it all came about and how it all turned out.

Part 3

Democracy and Decision Making

No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime.

- Kofi Annan

Overview

In this section of my thesis, I consider two themes that became important elements in my research project- democracy and governance. Looking back, I feel as though they were central to my research from its inception. Realistically, they emerged from a feeling of discombobulation with the world of teaching and my place in it, and an unfulfilled search for meaning that culminated in my ‘finding’ Sociocracy. The themes became clearer to me as I made connections between the work I did outside of education and my history within it, and the startling discovery that decision making could be framed differently if we changed the governance structure. My introduction to Sociocracy challenged me to consider what schools might be like if we changed the governance structure to enable greater democratic efficacy. Opportunities for me to develop as a democratic citizen throughout my teaching life seemed, on reflection, to be thin on the ground but maybe I hadn’t been attentive. Perhaps opportunities to become democratically empowered via communicative competence had simply gone begging – I needed to find out. Questions about democracy and citizenship, therefore, helped me frame my research question: *What happens when teachers are given an opportunity to make decisions about issues that impact on their lives?* An understanding of governance helped me think about organisational structures and how they can help or hinder the flow of quality information around an organisation, and moderate the opportunities for democratic participation. Each theme interweaves one with the other to create both possibilities and dilemmas for schools teetering on the edge of business-as-usual models of schooling caught in a bygone industrial age or recognising that our world demands something else of education.

I address each theme separately and call on my research participants to assist me in my understanding as I ponder the possible importance and impact each has on schools, and why reimagining democracy, to a more participative paradigm, is vital if our schools are to meet the complex demands of education in a time of great uncertainty and change.

In Chapter 4 I examine critically the practice of democracy within schools that, on the eve of Australia implementing its first ever nation curriculum, increasingly serve

as a conduit for curriculum as cultural reproduction as described by Schubert (1985). Education in Australia today stands poised at a critical crossroad that threatens to pursue a political agenda far removed from a democratically envisioned curriculum grounded in participation and dialogue. In my opinion, it goes hand-in-hand with the current Federal Government's push to make teachers accountable by wielding the big stick of *transparency* via external benchmark testing and a naming and shaming website that exploits a myopic view of today's educational landscape. In Chapter 4 I challenge schools to seek a way to engage all stakeholders to exercise their democratic voice through full participation in the decisions that influence their own and their students' lives. With teachers' voices largely absent from the curriculum, and entirely absent from the benchmark testing story, I marshal the relevant literature in a call for schools to become sites where all stakeholders - students, teachers, parents and the broader community - experience what it means to be(come) a citizen through day-to-day opportunities to witness and contribute to democracy in action.

I begin the chapter by returning to my birthplace, New Zealand, and describe how I was formed within a particular, grassroots, democratic framework. As with all my chapters, the voices of my co-participants are woven throughout my writing, linking me to them and both of us to the literature. I then describe my years of teaching where democracy became invisible to me and me to it as I became en-cultured into the world of education. In the section *Democracy – look ma no hands* I ask who has been looking out for democracy if I wasn't and I discuss what democracy has become in our curriculum today. I conclude the chapter by looking at the promises of democracy re-visioned and suggest that realising the democratic ideal can only happen if re-structuring and re-culturing occurs in schools simultaneously, guided by passionate and empowered leaders.

I begin Chapter 5 by reflecting on my own decision making processes that help to point out the complex and interconnected nature of making decisions. I look at how decisions are traditionally made in schools and question the link between decisions and perceived actions arising from those decisions. The governance structures in schools is examined along with questions about meetings – what they're for, who attends them, and whether there are opportunities for teachers to contribute to the evolutionary process of democracy.

I conclude this part of my thesis by suggesting an alternative to decision making processes in schools by restructuring governance to provide opportunities for deep dialogue and democratic empowerment.

Chapter 4: Democracy Lost and Found(ed)

My first recollection of democracy was as a 6 year old sitting on top of the tall gate-posts that marked the edge of our family property, in New Zealand. It was the end of the Labour Day holiday weekend, October 1958, and my brother and I played a game that was to become almost as popular as cowboys and Indians. As the cars passed by we challenged the hundreds of holiday-makers, returning home from enjoying the first heat of summer weather, into revealing their political allegiances - they had a choice of two. We waved frantically to the people in each car and if they waved back they were Labour. We'd cheer them, "Yaaaay, Labourites!" If they didn't they were National. It was that simple and that complex as the division between the workers and the rest of the population was defined by my coal-miner father and embedded in our childhood psyches. The lines were clearly drawn; we voted Labour and we played rugby league. We were Irish Catholic and we hated the Queen and cockies²⁸ with equal passion. When I was 12, my sister married a farmer. My parents never recovered from the act of political treason: a farmer meant he was protestant, he played rugby union but, even more catastrophically, it meant he voted National.



Figure Six

When the time came to cast my first vote, as a 21 year old, the political climate had changed to reflect more turbulent but exciting times: university education was free and jobs plentiful. As students we sang *about* freedom and demonstrated *for*



Figure Seven – The protest

freedom. When the All Blacks²⁹ left for the 1969 tour of South Africa we travelled in an all-night convoy to march on the Wellington Airport, to invade the tarmac and to get arrested if we could. We marched for a purpose and for no purpose at all. "Flavour the Pill!" declared one of the signs we rallied

to as, transient student residents, we descended on the long-suffering locals in the small university town that hosted us during semester time. We had discovered the

²⁸ In New Zealand, a derisive term for farmers

²⁹ The New Zealand rugby team

power of American culture-the Summer of Love and Woodstock- and shared the fun of it all by electing a wizard as mayor of a southern city and imagined political parties named after Disney characters- such pleasure and abundance in a purple haze.

It was a long time before I met democracy again. It was a strange and puzzling meeting; the signs were vague and barely recognisable as, in my mind, I connected them back to those earlier times when I had taken a stake in what was happening in the world...it all began to come back to me. The meeting was a community forum where the residents were asked to contribute to the dialogue, to share their ideas and to participate in decision making. It seemed that in the intervening years, between 1972 and 2006, something had happened to democracy that I had failed to notice and now I was witnessing the beginning of an attempt to rebalance the scales between representative democracy and citizen participation. I became re-engaged in the political process by facilitating town meetings and community forums. Resources and utility companies; petroleum companies and not-for-profits; non-government and government organisations; each came with an agenda to regrow democracy from the rootstock of its foundation principles through dialogue and participation by the *demos* – the people. In the conclusion to this thesis you will see how this reconnection with democracy has had a critical impact on my emerging present.

As my eyes were suddenly opened to new possibilities, I began to notice alarming patterns in the conversations being held about democracy and the reasoning behind why things had to change. The view that liberal democracy had hollowed out the public sphere and as a democracy we were in crisis appeared to be widely held (Barber, 2003; Toms, 2002; Willis & Carden, 2004); so too, the view that in a complex and turbulent world democracy needed to be re-visioned in order to protect all the people (Latham, 2009; Fukuda-Parr 2002). It was clear that I wasn't the only citizen to have invested my blind faith in believing that the people chosen to represent my views were, indeed, doing their job (Gore, 2007). That thought was alarming enough. More disconcerting, however, was a claim by Habermas that education would provide the means to democratic redemption.

It is the educational institutions of a democratic society which bear the burden of developing the capabilities needed for the public sphere to function effectively.

(as cited in Wills & Cardin, 2004, p. 419)

In the years between 1972 and 2006, I had been a teacher in those educational institutions, and not once had I heard the public sphere mentioned, nor the capabilities I was required to develop to ensure it functioned effectively. Now, as I looked around at the work being done to re-engage the democratic ideal in the community, education was still nowhere to be found. It didn't surprise me, I realised. It was just as I expected it to be. I was witnessing firsthand what I had intuited – the democratic deficit- “the perceived gap between democratic structures and processes and the public's satisfaction with these traditional means of civic engagement” (McGreagor, 2004, p. 104). In educational institutions, wedded to traditional autocratic leadership and a largely compliant and fearful workforce, developing the capabilities for the public sphere to function effectively would indeed be a burden (Palmer, 2006). Rufo-Lignos and Richards put it like this: “The control of public schools through our democratic system has resulted in (a culture of) social control and maintaining social class distinctions, rather than true democracy” (2003, p. 760).

Democracy: on the oval eating lunch³⁰

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, p. 34, 2000.

Democracy - a political system in which the supreme power lies in a body of citizens who can elect people to represent them (dictionary on the web), a practice of freedom, participation, transformation, critical and creative dealing with reality, communicative competence (Habermas, 2003), a safeguard for the dignity and

³⁰ The term, *he/she goes to school to eat his/her lunch*, is used in jest, to describe the behaviour of an educationally disengaged student

freedom of all people and empowering (Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World, 2003).

The glaring paradox between the expectations placed on education institutions to bear the burden of democracy re-imagined³¹, and the reality of democratic possibilities that lie within schools, became the focus of my research project. To begin I reflected on my own experience in the various places I had worked since finishing my teacher training in 1971 and tried to find where democracy existed beside and within me throughout that time; a time when the work of John Dewey could be both hailed as inspirational and ignored as impractical. I invite you to read the following reflections, not as a critique of the principals who I scraped up against throughout my career, but through the eyes of a teacher, who entered the school as a whole and passionate person and left, hollowed out; empty. I invite you to reflect on the questions: How could we have kept her passionately engaged? What could she have done differently? How hard do we work today to make sure the best don't leave when the data shows that they do?³² How much do we care?

Reflections

Dateline: 1972, Conservative Primary School, New Zealand

Paula, a newly minted teacher, is called into the Principal's office

Principal: My wife came to take a class yesterday and was horrified at the length of your skirt. You need to dress *professionally*. And while you're here, I was embarrassed by...

Dateline: 1973, Don't Get Pregnant Primary School, Melbourne

Paula, an anxious 22 year old, waits outside the principal's office

Paula: Excuse me, Mr King

Principal: Yes

Paula: I just wanted to let you know that I'm pregnant.

Principal: Well, not to be helped. You'll need to be taken out of the class immediately. We'll find other duties for you.

Paula: But...I'll be here for another 6 months, at least. My class is all set up...

³¹ Democracy re-imagined is necessary to create a more just, inclusive society. It requires citizens to become active and connected players rather than passive recipients of the promise of democracy.

³² *Young teachers quit; the rest just get older* at <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/01/25/1042911595148.html>; The process of educating teachers to quickly leave the profession is compared to a sand bucket with holes in it. Universities fill up the schools then many of the teachers slip through the holes, often within four years of graduating.

Principal: Oh, you'll be too tired to run that class, you'll want to leave earlier than that. We'll make it easier for you to leave earlier and not upset the class too much. Better we do it now rather than later.

Dateline: 1982, Teach the Dogma Primary School, Melbourne

Paula is called into the Principal's Office

Principal: I've been told that you criticised the Easter Religious Education document.

Paula: Huh?

Principal: I was told that you said, "Well don't think I'm going to teach that religious stuff!"

Paula: Ha-ha!! Yeah, I was just kidding around. You *know* I teach it. We were having a bit of fun.

Principal: I expect you to be *professional*, Paula. Don't ever criticise Catholic Education documents again.

Dateline: 1995, Framed Primary School, Perth

Paula is called into the Principal's office

Principal: I've looked at your planning and it seems fine but you're not using the template I put out for everyone.

Paula: Yeah, I found it really hard to use so I made my own up. I need to connect everything so that it's clear in my mind. See here how....

Principal: You will use the common planning template. You need to be more *professional*, Paula, and show support for me.

Dateline: 1999, Don't be Critical Catholic College, Perth

Paula waits to be called into the Deputy Principal's office

DP: I have a letter of complaint here about your *unprofessional* behaviour at the professional development day you attended at the Catholic Education Office. You are required to attend a meeting with the director and apologise to the facilitators.

Paula: Huh?

DP: It seems you sat there and did your uni assignment.

Paula: Are you kidding me? I did that? Where did that come from?

DP: Well according to the letter you were overheard saying...

Paula: Ahhhhh...I get it...I get where this is coming from. He didn't mention the feedback sheet I filled in and signed my name to did he? He didn't mention that I wrote, "Come on CEO, start treating us as if we have a brain," did he?

DP: Oh for goodness sake, Paula, keep your head down and your nose clean. Nobody writes the truth on those forms and you certainly *don't* sign your name!

Dateline: 2003, We're a Family Primary School, Tower Hamlets, London

Paula waits to be called in to the Principal's office

Principal: I've looked through the student's maths books and I can see you've missed marking some of their work.

Paula: Oh, I meant not to mark them. We did it in class through discussion and now I want the kids to go back and improve...

Principal: We don't teach that way! You **MUST** follow the script for each lesson and the lesson didn't say, 'discuss with the students!' We report to OFSTED and...

Paula: David, I'm only here for a few weeks and I teach...

Principal: I don't care how it works in Australia! You will do it my way and you **WILL** mark the students work. We're *professional* here at We're A Family. You came highly recommended from the agency and I expect you to toe the line!

Paula: David, when I took this work the agency told me you were a dickhead. I've worked for a lot of dickhead's in my life and survived but you know what...you're a dickhead and I don't actually need this job, so see ya later!

My experience of democracy in schools reminded me of the lines in the novel, *Cutting for Stone* where one of the characters comments that "Malgudi was populated by characters that resembled people we knew, imprisoned by habit, by profession, and by a most foolish and unreasonable belief that enslaved them ; only they couldn't see it" (Verghese, 2010, pp. 257-258). In the school environments mentioned above we teachers laboured under the foolish and unreasonable belief that we were born to follow internal sanctions on our individualism while principals laboured believing that external rules determined their role - each of us enslaved inside a world view that we couldn't see much less escape from. Our roles resembled polar extremes in a magnetic field forcing us to react against each other despite our sameness and an inherent belief that we were there for the same purpose.

And so, as the years roll by and I struggle to find my voice I become less compliant and more defiant, less hopeful and more angry; convinced that schools were, and eternally would be, bogged down in a quagmire of patriarchy where teachers are valued more for their herd mentality and capacity to follow instructions, and less for their critical and creative dealing with reality. But that is just my story. For the purpose of my research project and my own moral purpose I needed to know where the democratic possibilities lay for others engaged in education. Perhaps Habermas had some insider knowledge about the capacity for schools to bear the democracy burden that my increasingly despondent eyes couldn't see. As I began my research project my initial questioning about whether democratic opportunities were experienced in schools drew this response from one of my co-participants.

Dear Paula

Sorry I wasn't at school last week but I've put a few thoughts down here that might help answer the question about where I've seen democracy at work in my previous schools. Let me know if I can help you with anything else.

Our meetings began at 3.35 and were scheduled to finish at 5.45pm, with a five minute break in between; lengthy meetings. The explanation was that we were having our PLT³³ meeting and staff meeting on the same day, however in 2/3 of the cases we didn't have a PLT, it would be whole staff, one presenter at the front scrolling through some PowerPoint presentation.

On the occasions they did incorporate the PLT meeting into the afternoon, it was after a one hour or so presentation /discussion and the task ahead was so complicated hardly anyone (except the nerdy people) actually finished it in the time allocated and then it had to be completed in your own time.

The only knowledge I had about the upcoming meeting was the topic; the week 5 meeting will be about maths, so I would perhaps take my math's framework and hope for the best. A significant issue with this was that there

³³ Professional Learning Team

still needed to be time allocated as a staff to discuss issues of general business. So the Principal would say what he needed to say, as with the Deputy and so forth. Depending on what they had to say and whether they wanted us to discuss a particular issue, time would be ticking away, so the person in charge of presenting the maths would be held up, which in turn delayed the meeting somewhat.

There were times (generally 3-4 per term) where meetings didn't finish until after 6.00 and when you live 40 minutes from the school that is a huge difference to finishing at 5.45. As a result of presenters being delayed, they probably felt rushed because there wasn't adequate time to present the information, or they simply continued, but to a disengaged audience because people were impatient to leave! After a long day at school, the last thing people want is to stay back until 6 (or longer) in meetings.

Another significant factor was that my last school achieved a very low score in the 4- yearly CEO³⁴ school review/audit; particularly in the areas of staff wellbeing and significant learning areas. To provide an example, 7 teachers moved on in 2007 and another 5 teachers are moving on at the end of 2008. This is probably as a result of increased pressure and workload and not fully understanding what was expected of them.

The low score in the review meant that many areas needed to be brought up to standard and we were allocated additional funding and two years in which to see improvements.

The staff was divided into specific areas (Faith, Community, Teaching & Learning, Pastoral Care) and in our groups we had to work out what we as a group would do to raise the profile of our specific area. No time was allocated in the staff meeting for these professional discussions, instead another fortnightly meeting on another night was introduced and it became the expectation that we would attend. Add to this load, Sacramental

³⁴ Catholic Education Office

meetings, parent meetings and the other happenings in school life and it is easy to see that, at times we were meeting to discuss another meeting. Not only did I feel overwhelmed and stressed, but with the workload there was not enough time to pursue personal interests.

My dad often became frustrated and annoyed with me because I would come home from school, shower, eat and get back on the computer for a few hours to do more work. I can't imagine what pressure staff members with children were under.

One last comment was the absolute lack of communication. Some communication was done during staff meetings; other was during recess or lunchtime. An announcement would be made, and people who were in the staffroom at the time would be expected to pass on the announcement to people who were on duty or in their classrooms etc. The other method was over the PA system. There were times when announcements (during teaching time) would go for 5 minutes! It was as though the speakers enjoyed hearing the sounds of their voices, or didn't want to walk to individual classrooms to deliver a message.

As a staff member new to the school, I felt as if I was expected to know the school procedures and daily routines when in fact I didn't. There were "sucky sucky" people who had been at the school for years who would answer questions in a 'round about' way and a clear response was not achieved.

Thank you Paula for being so patient with me and I hope this piece is of help to you.

Kind Regards,

Kerry

(research co-participant, personal communication, November 24,
2008)

As I read the email from Kerry, I sigh as I feel the gaping disconnect between Kerry the teacher and Kerry the human; Kerry's emotional life-world that has been bureaucratised by an interventionist state (Habermas in Dews, 1999). I feel her pain at being separated from the decisions that impact on her work and her ability to live an undivided life (Palmer, 2006). Her comments are replicated by other co-participants who tell me they have felt:

herded together by identical professional development, no place to talk about our work together, shared meanings- hardly! push of external measures, lack of collaboration, top-down management, lack of trust, leadership from the top, no place to speak the truth, power of old culture- that's not how we do it here, competition, fear...

(interview transcripts, February, 2008)

If I take away the context of my thesis I consider that I could almost be forgiven for thinking my co-participants are talking about a radical dictatorship. Stop, for a moment, my reader, before you question the extremeness of my comparison. I agree that you might say that the danger posed by a culture of impunity in some countries is so much greater to their citizens than the loss of power to a teacher because of democracy gone haywire in our schools, but is the effect so very different? It is easy for us to recognise the corruption of democracy in countries other than our own because we are blinded, especially in the Lucky Country,³⁵ to the possibility that our democracy is anything but perfect. It is difficult to recognise the enemy of democracy in our midst for he looks and acts just like us and so it is easier for us to appreciate distant horrors wired to us via right-there media. If we use the vision of corrupt leaders as a metaphor for our life-world hijacked by bureaucracy, then, in this context, in this culture, in this time, is the disempowerment of our teachers any less a crime against humanity? Is the prevalence of patriarchy in our school system any less dehumanising that in countries that we, in the West, consider less democratically enlightened?

³⁵ First coined by Professor Donald Horne in his book of the same name, the term *The Lucky Country* has become synonymous with everything that is great about Australia.

This is a good place to stop and go back into the research arena and ask Bella, one of my co-participants to tell you her story. It might give you some insight into the great democratic paradox in Australian schools – the belief that we have the right to determine our own lives and the reality that, at the end of the day, a distant authority holds all the cards.

Scenario:

Bella is a teacher at Beachlands. Employed mid-way through the first year of my research, she immediately takes on a leadership role in the new meeting structure and also introduces the governance structure into her classroom. She excitedly watches as her students embrace the notion of decision-making in action and she tells me how much quicker the students take on leadership roles in the meetings compared to the teachers in the staff meetings. An ongoing dilemma for Bella, however, is the knowledge that she is on a temporary contract with the school and, in the absence of any indication from the principal that her contract will be renewed, she realises that she will have to consider applying for other jobs.

A few weeks before the end of third term, the principal calls her into his office and tells her that she *will* have a job the following year. She is delighted and relieved; a feeling that is short-lived as she waits for official confirmation of the appointment. I'll let Bella take up her story.

I was beginning to get really nervous about not getting official notification about my job next year. Everyone was talking about it and there were three of us kind of in the same boat. Two of us had been told we had jobs and one other person had been told they didn't. I asked the Assistant Principal if I should go to the Principal and ask him for a letter or something and she said I should. That was ok. I did that and he said he'd do something up for me and I got the letter a few days later and it was all good. That day I went into the staffroom after school and the other two temporary teachers were there. One said to me, "*So, Bella, did you get your letter?*" I felt uncomfortable right from the start because the teacher who had been told there was no job was sitting there. I muttered yes or something but she persisted.

“So was it good news?”

“Ahhhh, yeah...”

“So was it VERY good news?”

I had no idea what she was getting at so I just stood there looking stupid.

“Well, I got VERY good news. I got my permanency.”

WHAT!!...I couldn't believe it. I felt like I was going to cry; it was so unfair. We'd both started at the school together. I felt like I had worked so hard and done so many extra things. There had never been any mention that one of us would get permanency. I fled from the staffroom back to my class and it just kept going around and around in my head. What did I do wrong? How could I have missed out? I can't even tell you how I felt; just all mixed up and confused and angry. It just seemed pointless, the things I was doing with my kids, the way I'd involved myself in the school...

A couple of days later I found out that another teacher had gotten her permanency as well. That was fine because she'd been there longer than me so it made sense but the other thing just wouldn't go away. I felt so worthless and confused about how I could make myself more valuable here. The teacher next door came in a few days later with this look of ...well like...like triumph.

“Pity about ya bad luck!”

“Huh!”

“Yeah, they pulled the names out of a hat!”

Ok...so if it was bad before then now it was hopeless. Before I thought there was something I could do, now it boiled down to luck. I was soooo furiously angry but I knew there was nothing I could do about it. How can you get justice in this? Who can you complain to when it's your boss doing this to you? I couldn't sleep so I went in the next morning and knocked on the boss's door.

“I wonder if you could tell me how come I missed out on getting a permanent job.”

He kept typing and didn't look up from his computer screen. *“It was a toss of the coin.”*

“Is there any chance that I could put in a bid on my own behalf?”

He looked up and sighed. *“NO.”*

“So you're saying that I should just suck it up and live with it?”

“Pretty much.”

Our Principal versus our metaphorical dictator? In Bella's eyes, it's a toss of the coin.

A search of the literature reveals that Shor considers it rare for teachers and principals to enter into discussion about democratic forms of management and that schools prevail within an authoritarian structure that lulls educators into a passive role as citizens that “rubs democratic impulses the wrong way” (cited in Kincheloe, 1993, p. 219). In the examples cited above we can see an imbalance of power, a lack of voice, an incapacity for justice and coherent, respectful discussion (Newman, cited in Willis & Carden, 2004, p. 139). But is it just the rank-and-file who feel the absence of democratic principles? Not so, according to the assistant principals and principals in my study; they too report feeling disempowered, afraid and unable to chart a course towards a coherent future.

We just do strategies, there's no ownership, we want to move forward and not wait but they're waiting to be fed the information. There's no structure...the structures we use now - nothing gets done. There's an agenda but it's all management it's not about running schools, I send out readings but no one ever says, well, thanks for that or...I get sick inside every week when we have to go to the staff meeting and do professional learning. I'm scared that they look at me and go, “right, you're the guru, tell us what to do!”

(Leadership Team, personal conversation, November 16, 2009)

You know the picture you showed me of all the boats being connected to the mother ship and moving towards the agreed destination? Well, our ships are all individuals

just floating about in the water, some are bobbing happily up and down, oblivious to everything, some are calling for a life raft and some are off the radar. No one has a clue where we're going. The principal must know but the rest of us just sit there and think, 'what the hell is he up to now?' There's no connection to our vision or mission statement...actually, people don't even remember we have one and we only did it last term!

(Assistant principal, personal conversation, September, 2009)

A first pass of the conversations that occur regularly in schools reveals a seeming disconnect between what teachers say they want in order to do their work and what endowed leaders say they need to create successful schools. You might hear:

Lack of confidence, parameters not defined, what can we do, they can't, they don't, wrong decisions, toes to be stepped on, boundaries to be crossed, win and lose, people think, big job.

But listen closely; feel the rumble of intent and you will hear underlying desires that are sourced from the same essence; desires that go beyond the day-to-day mechanics of running an organisation. Each side speaks of a desire to;

*Make sense, take hold, step up, empower, initiate, own, be courageous, and collaborate, be inclusive, encourage, be proactive, drive momentum, see it all, follow through, aim towards, listen out, create coherence, build community, feel connected, value.*³⁶

While school populations immerse themselves in finding fault, each side with the other, and focussing on the negative aspects of their relationships, opportunities to create desired futures are falling, unexplored, to the ground and washing away on a tide of hopelessness (Laszlo, E, 2006). So too, a sense of hopelessness pervades dreams of what the future might mean to education and sends dreamers off into the corners of their minds to dream alone. A dream becomes lost in a hubbub of perceived conditions loudly proclaimed by the resident naysayers on the staff – BUT! We're *controlled by technology, moving too fast, left behind, isolated, worse for wear, can't imagine, losing small things, out of control, can't be done ...*

³⁶ Words taken from conversations with teachers and leaders about what they desire in schools

It's hard to find democracy in schools today; the democracy that practices freedom, participation and transformation; that critically and creatively deals with reality. Standing on the shore of democratic possibilities I look to the horizon and create my own dream and attend to my own struggle with the realisation that the very attributes that Habermas claims is essential to achieving the democratic ideal are clearly missing from the frame. The capacity for communicative competence and the ideal speech situation amongst and between educators is buried underneath a fog of managerialism and power plays (Hindess, B, 1996). But what does it matter? How might the world benefit from a citizenry that lives the democratic ideal and what might be our fate if they do not? Surely teachers don't really have to follow Ghandi's advice and *be the change they want to see*. After all, teachers want to see learners in their classrooms – they don't necessarily want to *be* learners. So can't they just teach about democracy and hope for the best?

Democracy – look ma...no hands!

If I think back to my experience of democracy, between 1972 and 2006, I can see that I had invested my blind faith in a system that had always existed for me. I trusted democracy to look after my affairs and to do its work unimpeded by what would have been my stunted and uninformed input, in any case. Democracy freewheeled through my life without the slightest need to be accountable to me. It had no need to put its hands on the wheel and steer a charted course. Was anyone out there caring if I didn't?

In class I taught about democracy-the formal levels of government, boooooor....RING! Levels of government in the curriculum equalled levels of schooling– Year 5, local government, Year 6, State Government and Year 7...you guessed it! We'd visit the Constitution Education Centre and, yawn.....eye roll...kids filling in worksheets. Get me outta here!

Active citizenship popped up on the radar in 1996 with the introduction of the Curriculum Framework for schools in Western Australia and, in response to a rediscovered political interest in citizenship, a curriculum entitled Discovering Democracy was developed with the support of Federal Government funding.

Curriculum materials were distributed free to all Australian schools beginning in 1997 aimed at getting students back *into* democracy and onto the citizenship train bound for a new age. Not surprising, given the initial feedback received from schools, the effective application of Discovering Democracy was problematic. Teachers proved to be resistant to change, particularly in what they saw as an addition to the real curriculum.

In 2000, one year before Australia celebrated a century of nationhood, a discussion paper on Civics and Citizenship Education produced the following statement:

The need for a student body, which becomes informed, active citizens, has been well documented in the literature. In Australia's case, this is considered essential if we are to remain a leading proponent of liberal democracy in the world. Given our high levels of obligatory participation through compulsory voting in elections, an informed populace is a logical necessity.

(Print and Gray, 2000)

Informed about what? The paper provided a case for greater emphasis to be placed on citizenship education in Australian schools in the light of the impact of historical policy that has pushed the notion off the radar. According to the authors, democratic freedoms and practices are so absorbed into the Australian life-world that the role education has played in establishing and maintaining our democracy has largely been ignored. In order to re-establish the debate around citizenship and what it means for education today, the authors call for a review of the role of civics education at a time when they claim “a substantial deficit in citizenship understanding by Australian school students” and “Australians (who have) appeared to be content with the extension of their colonial past.” Attitudes expressed through the white paper articulated a desire for the survival of democracy for future generations by “forge(ing) a learning environment that encourages students to become active, informed and concerned citizens in a new age.” (Print & Gray, 2000)

If, as the authors of the white paper indicate, active participation is desirable for the health of our democracy and if an informed populace is a “logical necessity” then it is surprising that no link has been made between the successful implementation of such an important document to a teacher’s capacity to appreciate that the very future of Australia and its position as “one of the world’s oldest and most successful

democracy” is seemingly at stake (Print & Gray, 2000). So what has happened in citizenship education since 1996? Charged with the task of developing notions of citizenship (Crick & Joldersma, 2007) I go hunting for answers on the education department website and find a promise.

Specific teaching content and opportunities for active citizenship are identified in the Society and Environment learning area scopes and sequences for Culture, Time Continuity and Change and Natural and Social Systems.

(The Department of Education website, 2009)

But the promised content and opportunities are as vague today as they were in 1996 as I scour the Education Department website for answers. Civics and Citizenship Education continues to form the basis of teaching *about* democracy in schools while teaching *for* democratic participation continues to be a hopeful aspiration, at best. As if by willing it to be so teachers can provide the means for students to become “active, informed and concerned citizens in a new age” (Print & Gray, 2000) despite the claim that a teacher’s conception of democracy is a fundamental influence on how children learn democracy in schools (Ross & Yerger, 1999).

I talk to teachers in my host schools about their understanding of democracy and whether opportunities exist to live democratic principles as they teach them. While Crick and Joldersma (2007) may argue that responsible citizenship education requires teachers who envision themselves as broad-based change agents, teachers tell a story similar to the ones I told earlier in this chapter about the limited opportunities they have for active citizenship and decision making based on achieving mutual understanding through dialogue.

Kristen: *Decisions? Ha! Arrr...that’s funny, I’m not sure if I’ve ever seen... Well, it all seems to be discussed, discussed, discussed...*

She clasps her hands in front of her like a prayer and slides them across the space between us drawing an invisible timeline that waves off into nowhere

...I may not know about it but you know if we discuss it in our PLC³⁷ and it opens everything and like what everyone wants then obviously

³⁷ Professional Learning Community

everyone wants different things. So the decision is made by....the top dogs but ummmm that side of things is a bit confusing.

Kate: *What **can't** we talk about at school? Well, pretty much everything. I Introduced a proposal to look at teacher stress and what we could do about it as a community because it was beginning to impact on all kinds of things. Everyone got really excited about it and I thought it was going to be a great way to get everything that was concerning people out in the open in a positive way that would lead to action. I kept the principal informed but it didn't get past the third meeting. He held me to ransom over it and I eventually decided it wasn't worth the trouble.*

So what couldn't we talk about? Stress...you just have to get over it! Umm...you can't talk about why some people refuse to collaborate or why some get away with doing nothing and others have to carry the load.

You can't talk about how you'd like to see decisions made or what you'd like to be able to do to...I think it's ok to talk about anything that isn't to do with education. You can probably talk about science or maths or something, like what you're going to teach, but not anything important like how you teach.

Bev: *Yeah, if I want something I'll go to the principal and ask. It's not like I can make any decisions without his say so.*

He would say he trusts me but he doesn't really.

I know because he questions me and asks what I've done and every now and again I get bawled out for doing something that he doesn't agree with. I feel like I'm not on solid ground.

Jane: *I'd use the word top-down to describe this school; most of the time. There are times when we're allowed to make decisions ...within the classroom...but a lot has to be passed through administration. Some of the professional learning meetings have been great, we've made some decisions but again that has to be passed through administration and, yeah, it just seems to come from top, which it has to.*

Why?

Well...it just does...yeah...yeah...That's why.

I'm not one to get up in a meeting but it would be nice to have more of a say.

Marg: *Power? The principal holds most of the power. There's no open discussion. The principal likes using email so you might get to hear what he has to say but not other people's responses.*

Terry: *People come to meetings uninformed...yes people's thinking done on the spot. If I see a meeting agenda I assume I'm going to be the jug to be filled up.*

The bigger issues that need to be dealt with...that's my frustration...it changes on a day-to-day basis. I have no idea, nothing is resolved.

I can do the duty roster...even that is a hassle...I hear it in passing; people whine...there's no place to discuss problems...

(transcribed conversations with selected co-participants at Beachlands, throughout 2008/9)

What seems to be in evidence in some Australian schools is a democracy defined as a quagmire of operational minutiae and administrative concerns (Mumford, 2008); democracy unable to participate effectively despite an aspiration to do so. Representations of democracy in schools have been hijacked by successive governments, who respond to society's cultural identity crises by imposing the current version of democracy for social reconstruction in order to regulate the conduct of society³⁸ (Hindess, 1996). They do so safe in the knowledge that their plans will be, according to Ernest, "passively absorbed and implemented" by teachers who, as we can see from the examples above, have few avenues to buck a system whose strategies are "deeply embedded" and well accepted in the public consciousness, even if they wanted to (as cited in Steffe & Gale, 1995 p.461). A co-participant in my research tells me

People got excited about the toilet discussion³⁹ but there's not that same sense of excitement about curriculum. Why? Because it's a document to them. It's there and they have to do it but it's, "Hurry up I have to do this." There's no time to talk about it.

(interview transcript, 2008)

If we accept that active participation, by all stakeholders, is a worthy aspiration in a democratic society, then schools clearly need to do better than acting as passive recipients and transmitters of government policy through civics and citizenship

³⁸ A timely example of government intervention in the purpose of schooling is the introduction, early in 2010, of the Myschool website, <http://www.myschool.edu.au/>, that claims by "providing extensive information on Australian schools, the *My School* website introduces a new level of transparency and accountability to the Australian school system."

³⁹ See explanation p. 192 & 203

(Fisher & Carson, as cited in Willis & Carden, 2004). But, if a democratic education isn't just the teaching and learning *about* democracy then what is it and what do schools need to do to develop the capabilities to become the harbingers of democracy re-imagined?

The Promise of Democracy: Called to Act

*...what else do lifelong learning, democracy and imagination boil down to?
We are lonely for where we are. We are all too often absent, in other words,
from the stage of our own lives-bystanders rather than participants in the
connected social world that the project of full democratic participation
envisions for everyone.*

(Dawson, as cited in Willis & Cardin, 2004)

In seeking answers to my questions I find the concept of the democratic ideal linked to many different images of what a citizen might aspire to do and be where democracy, prefaced by the words strong, deep and thick, indicates something different to the *thinness* of representative democracy. According to Barber (2003, p. 155), citizens deliberate, act, engage, share and contribute; citizens come into being through the mode of democratic citizenship unlike the passive form of citizenship reified by neoliberal discourse (McGregor, 2004). Deliberative democracy, on the other hand, involves citizens in setting the agenda for public policy and provides opportunities to find common grounds for action. Participants contribute to the process guided by critical norms of equity of participation, respect, tolerance and increased political efficacy (Schuman, 2006).

By these criteria, the teachers in my study cannot be defined as citizens of the school community in which they teach and, only by loose definition, belong. Ross and Yerger (1999) consider that for students to be able to learn the meaning of democracy teachers must have sophisticated conceptions of democracy grounded in principles cultivated throughout their lives. Bohman even suggests that schools should have minimum standards that achieve at the very least the possibility that each generation has the capacity to participate in public life and therefore perpetuate the democratic ideal (in Bohman, 1997).

Dewey's version of schools as a microcosm of a democratic society is, according to Ross and Yerger (1999), where students learn particular processes, values and attitudes to live effectively as citizens in a democratic society, a notion that Donnelly (2009), in his appraisal of Australia's education wars, 2005-2009, considers to be misty eyed, "New Age bumf". Never-the-less, with few opportunities to practice the behaviours and skills of democracy, Barber considers that "a breed of unreflected consensus, uniformity and conformity" is created in our schools that stifles democratic impulses and "leaves men as it finds them" (2003, p. 232).

According to Barber (2004), a critical aspect of a democratic community is that it produces remarkable change; something that ubiquitous attempts at education reform aspire to but rarely achieve. One wonders then why educational organisations shoot themselves in the foot through the systemic disempowerment of its actors, at every level (Barber, 2004). Surely, it is in the best interests of all of society to nourish human potentials and to facilitate the dialectic between the individual and the collective so that each may be renewed. Cohen and Arato (1992) think so as they claim that the intersection between the individual and other, facilitated through dialogue, establishes the public sphere and in doing so provides the stage for self renewal to take place. Schools claim to want to bring about a culture of collaboration, a place where the common world can be established, and yet resisters of the notion often exercise great power in driving the agenda of schools away from reasoned, informed deliberation, seemingly with impunity (Lefstein, 2008). Actors who are committed to democratic possibilities in establishing common ground for action often do so both at the mercy of their peers who resist change (you might recall Dani's experience in Chapter 1 where her passionate engagement with information technology was less than enthusiastically embraced by her peers), and by the ruling authority armed with a passion to perpetuate its grip on power, at all costs (Schuman, 2005). Six months after introducing a deliberative governance structure into my first host school, Grazia, a teacher, offered this eye-witness account of her struggle to establish common ground for action. Grazia had volunteered to facilitate the early meetings despite her misgivings that she didn't have the skills to lead her peers.

Grazia's Story

The process of the meetings, to me, is very clear. I've seen people get very confused and I don't know why they're confused. I don't know where the confusion is. I don't know why they keep saying, "I'm confused." What is there to be confused about? I'm confused about why they're confused!

We're not good at it yet but that's because there's a philosophy behind it that I don't understand yet, but that will come. It hasn't impacted on the work that's being done at school yet because they haven't embraced it. I don't think people are really into it yet. They will when they decide to get it. People who are not confused can see that it's good and that it works. They can see that there's a lot of work to be done out of school hours⁴⁰ and maybe that's the confusing bit. They don't want to do that extra work behind the scenes but those who are prepared to do it see that it's a very good way to run a school. Part of the reason some of the meetings didn't go according to plan is that the facilitator needs to make judgements, and pretty much on the spot. Couple of times I thought, "*Ouch!*"

No brilliant decisions have been made this term but we can see the place where decisions can be made. There's a split, the confused group have become more...ummm...less and less vocal. I think, as people come increasingly familiar with it, they'll understand they need to be better prepared. The confused people just say, "*Why are we doing this? We're just being told what to do in a different way.*"

(transcription of personal conversation, co-participant,
2008)

While common ground remains contested, divide and conquer tactics maintain the status quo and the citizenry are educated to be silent; a state reflected in schools by the absence of teacher's voices in decision making and lack of collegial support for

⁴⁰ The term, *out of school hours*, is a common place way that teachers refer to time spent on school activities that are not during direct teaching hours. Staff meetings and duties other than teaching time (DOTT) can sometimes be designated as being done *out of school hours*.

improvement (Fernandez-Balboa & Marshall, 1994). While one co-participant tells me that she loves working here because

He (the principal) hasn't made me do anything I don't want to do. It's great that we don't have to work together.

many more tell me that

Yes, I would love to have greater opportunities to collaborate. We don't have shared understandings. It's always talked about...go into each other's classrooms but it doesn't happen.

Discussions are held in passing. It would benefit from discussion where all of this could come out. We get directives to do things where there are bigger issues to deal with but it's just left...not explicit.

If there's controversy there's no forum for it to be discussed...no open discussion.

March (1988) tells us that idle talk, in this case, discussions held in passing, is so pervasive and persistent in organisations that it legitimizes collective action. Fernandez-Balboa and Marshall (1994) consider the absence of dialogue in traditional education is the primary cause for a lack of participation which has led to a politically static citizenry. In order to advance the principles of democracy, as it has been suggested is necessary for the future of our collective existence, teachers must be educated into its ways and be prepared to act towards advancing the common good. In education this could be reflected in the mechanisms that schools use to make informed decisions, the process used for implementation and the capabilities stakeholders have in order to be able to act. As Tushman and Anderson (2004) point out, decisions without action change nothing, therefore, for schools to become sites for reimagining the democratic ideal they must be able to organise to take action.

Conclusion

It is a critical time in education; a time when the political agenda of the day determines that a teacher's worth will be publically measured via external tests

published on a website.⁴¹ It is a time when teachers' voices should be heard but are silent in the face of a federal education minister who publically states that her teachers WILL do better. In 2010, just 9 months after the Global Financial Crisis delivered to Australia a first taste of fallout from international greed, and only 3 months from the failed Copenhagen Climate Summit our government seems to be hell-bent on turning its back on complexity and reducing the educational landscape into measurable chunks of statistical data. However, our politicians are, after all, a product of our education system that values the superiority of structuralist, rational thought. As educators we must accept at least some of the blame for our current crisis and determine to chart a different course; one that increases the value of the politically active citizen who is inclusive, subscribes to a hopeful pedagogy, and is prepared to act towards creating a more deeply democratic society that values the role of human emotion in thinking and behaviour (McGregor, 2004). The question is, are we prepared to take action as individuals in a time of great uncertainty and change? And are schools geared to provide the space and democratic context necessary for stakeholders to take action?

In Chapter 5 I take a look at the notion of governance and decision making, the steering mechanisms of a system, in an attempt to discover who drives the "educational bus," which stakeholders are included in making decisions concerning the educational enterprise and what rules and practices shape the schooling endeavour (Murphy, 2000, p. 57). Murphy considers it important to consider educational governance issues "because it is here, analysts aver, that important understandings of and foundations for a democratic society both take root and are played out" (p. 58). Questions about governance formed the catalyst for my research project, both conceptually and in practice, so I agree with Murphy that if I am to understand anything about a school's capacity to act in accordance with democratic principles I must know how it organises to do so and whether or not it has the capacity to mobilise to take action.

⁴¹ *My School* enables you to search the profiles of almost 10,000 Australian schools. You can quickly locate statistical and contextual information about schools in your community and compare them with statistically similar schools across the country. <http://www.myschool.edu.au/>

Chapter 5: Decision Making

Introduction

Journal, 5th February, 2010

As you can see, today is the 5th and, by the way, my 58th birthday. I'm sitting here at my desk anxious to begin Chapter 5 compelled by logic that time is running out fast; running off the edge of the cliff into an abyss of indecision and false starts. My age pressuring me like a foot in the back, you say? Noooo! - more of a long-term resistance to committing something to paper while I dig around the edges of this PhD, following this trail and that, wondering where to begin this chapter. I begin with this... and then begin again; precious time lost to *indecision*, procrastination and a tumbling chaos of choices. I had this chapter clearly mapped out last week; it's about governance and how decisions are made in schools; I clearly had it in my head! At least that's what I thought but, true to form, I struggle trying to contain my thinking inside the constraints of *A Chapter About Something Specific*. My mind goes on a joy ride through connections and imaginings that thrill and excite me at every twist and turn but, as the momentum slows, the question of how to represent the journey on paper pops up to spoil the ride and my bubble bursts. Decisions, decisions!! I take time out...

I remember a podcast, downloaded yesterday, that still sits unlistened to on my iPod. I dig around in my bag, attack the muddle of white chord and plug into *Australia Talks: Black Saturday Anniversary: Resilience one year on* (Van Extel, 2010). The conversation focuses on resilience and what it has to do with decision making and as I listen the structure of my chapter begins to fall into place. That's what happens, you see. I read books and articles about what I think is connected to my research but it's the most unlikely sources that help it all fall into place and I can decide.

Australian Football League coach, Ron Barassi talks about elevating 2nd tier recruits to give them a different experience as players and I think of *elevating* teachers to give them different leadership opportunities. The head of the Australian Chamber Orchestra describes how they restructured to create a more robust learning organisation and I imagine a Learning Hub as a place for mentoring leaders who have an eye on the horizon for future trends and conditions while working

strategically in the present. Now, as I listen to Professors Brian Walker and Bob Montgomery reflect on the devastation caused by the bush fires in rural Victoria last year, 2009, on *Black Saturday* and hear local resident, Daryl, give a first-hand account of the ongoing struggle faced by the community to come to grips with, in complexity terms, a catastrophic disturbance to the system, my chapter comes alive and I begin to map out the pathway Chapter 5 will take.

Making Decisions

I boldly place the heading in the middle of a blank page and draw a cloud around it (See Appendix G). As I listen to the conversation pulling on the complex twists and tangled threads of *Black Saturday* in attempting to find answers to the many wicked⁴² questions raised I begin to create a concept map. I draw a line from the centre and write *MEETINGS*. From there I ask the questions: who knows the process, who sets the agenda, what are the norms, is there convergence between dialogue (is there dialogue?) and a commitment to action? I remember reading something about the gap between talk and action. Next I write *TRADITIONS* and connect *Eastern and Western* with a line as I recall a scene from the Australian movie *Ten Canoes* (de Heer & Djigirr, 2006) where the tribal elders discuss solutions to a community problem. What struck me as I watched the movie was the way in which each person gave their opinion without reference to what others had said - they just spoke, as if to the circle, building on the knowledge with “yes, ands” and not diminishing what others had said with the “yes, buts...” I hear in most meetings I attend.

Next comes *HIERARCHY* and the structure of organisations. I draw an arrow out and write *business-as-usual* as the professors on the radio describe how (despite commonsense knowledge to the contrary that they were ineffective in dealing with the horror of a community in crisis) organisational structures are emerging from the ashes of *Black Saturday* much the same as before. *Resistance to change, information flow, power and gate keeping, values* (whose values?) and *purpose*; I link all these themes back to the concept of hierarchy and add another heading *PROCESS*. According to Professor Walker, decision making needs to have clear processes embedded in the vision or goal and leading from the purpose of the organisation. I rummage through the notes on my desk...where is it...ahhh yes! I

⁴² Complex problems that are highly resistant to finding solutions

wrote it down yesterday from *Stop the Meeting: I want to get off* where the author wrote “The mission should be like another person in the room” (Snair, 2003) !! I can’t resist the urge to put multiple exclamations to mark the number of frustrating conversations I’ve held in schools where the Mission is hidden in a policy manual or, as in some catholic schools, captured in reflective laminate hanging crucified on the wall in the lifeless company of the Son of God. I don’t think Snair (2003) meant for *the other person* in the room to be dead.

I wonder what the process is for making decisions in schools - is there one, what is missing? I write these questions underneath the cloud with *process* written in it and decide to make a heading of **VALUES**. People make decisions based on their values so what does that mean in a pluralistic society? Is the individual more important than the community? How can we create common understandings and shared values? Do we need to? Do our decisions making processes allow for tolerance of others? Is there time to deliberate or does a sense of urgency drive schools to reach unexplored agreement just to get the job done? If core values help to maintain the resilience of a system then how **RESILIENT** are schools? I write **learn**, and **adapt** to remind me to explore the notion of schools as learning organisations that adapt to conditions and maintain their identity after a major disturbance. Are they disturbed by headlines in the national newspaper that declare, as they did today: **Students get new subject: the test.**

I sit back and look at the map before me, and think; yeah, yeah...it’s coming together...but so what? While I explore each of the subheadings that link back to decision making I draw it all together with another heading, a big one both conceptually and in trying to fit the size of it on the page.

Schools- microcosms of sustainable, resilient organisations

Where I hope this is all heading is to considering a broader view of education; a view that places schools in the heart of their communities as exemplary learning organisations that make informed and intelligent decisions, adapt to conditions, are driven by core values and exploit opportunities. For that we need - and here I draw another sub heading - **ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE**. I dig out my notes on governance, the ones I made when I began this chapter last week and thankfully

realise that my efforts were not altogether wasted after all! I attach a link - **natural systems, flexible, self-organising**, and another - **enhance social capital**, to the sub heading and in bigger letters: **DEEPENING DEMOCRACY** and **SOCIOCRACY** that will link this chapter back to the previous one on democracy as well as take it forward to the chapter's conclusion. But for now let's go back to Chapter 5, Making Decisions where, as outlined above, I will investigate how schools organise themselves to make decisions and how they can position and leverage themselves to respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse and pluralistic society.

An Accidental Organisation

Decisions are often made in situations that are quite distant from the situations implicit in the ideas of rational choice. Neither the precise decisions, the alternatives, the objectives, nor the causal structures are clear.

(March & Sevon, 1988, p. 432)

I sit quietly and listen as the leadership team at Beachlands Primary School describes its organisational structure to me. When I enter the school for the first time I meet with the traditional decision-makers and ask: who meets, when do they meet, and why? I doodle on my notepad as they speak, capturing what I think the organisational structure looks like. As each person speaks, interrupting and correcting each other from time-to-time, I try to create a picture of who meets together, what they meet for, when they meet and for how long. I draw *Catholic Education Office* up the top, and then *The Board*. I listen for the next group to be mentioned and draw a circle out there, cross out and draw another. Frustration at my inability to grasp the boundaries and definitions makes me wonder if my blinkered vision is stopping me from seeing what must be clear to them. I circle the leadership team with a hard line, round and round as if to capture them there and not let them escape like the pastoral care team that misted away when I hear:

Oh, but they never meet! I don't think we have one right now.

I'm trying to understand the governance structure of the school so I ask, how do you make decisions? Who meets together and how do you meet? I get the principal and the two deputies into the picture; they come first, then there's the general group, termed 'the rest of the staff,' that sits uneasily as an unruly group of blurred actors.

In some schools all staff *belong* to this group, in others the teacher assistants are not part of the structure, part-timers are problematic and seem to resist all attempts at capturing them into the organisational framework. I wonder how they get their information; how they know what to do and who they get their information from knowing that, as we explored in the previous chapter, idle chatter often legitimizes collective action (March & Sevón, 1988).

I show my attempt at capturing the organisational structure to the principal.

No, no, it's not like that. Here, there's a group there who meet to, well, I think they are the pastoral committee.

The Deputy Principal interjects;

I don't think they meet any more. They used to but I think...well maybe we should ask Barry.

Didn't we decide to break the groups up into the four areas of concern that we focussed on in the strategic plan?

(transcription from leadership team meeting, recorded 2008)

Things were becoming clearer; perhaps I had assumed too much. I had assumed that the organisational structure was more than just a framework. I assumed that the groups they spoke about had a role to play in the school; met, made decisions, acted on those decisions and that there was some form of accountability. Why would I think that when my commonsense knowledge told me how it really worked? I thought back to a time when I had an opportunity to be on a technology committee at a high school where I worked for a time. It seemed really important when the principal called for applications and we were told that the best team would be chosen. I was passionate about using information technology with my students, as you may have guessed from reading Chapter 1, and I wanted to be able to contribute to the current and future plans at the school. As the chosen ones we met weekly and deliberated over policy and came up with a range of plans to implement it. And then it died. Each week we'd meet to make further plans while waiting for some sign that implementation was imminent, or at the very least being considered by the leadership

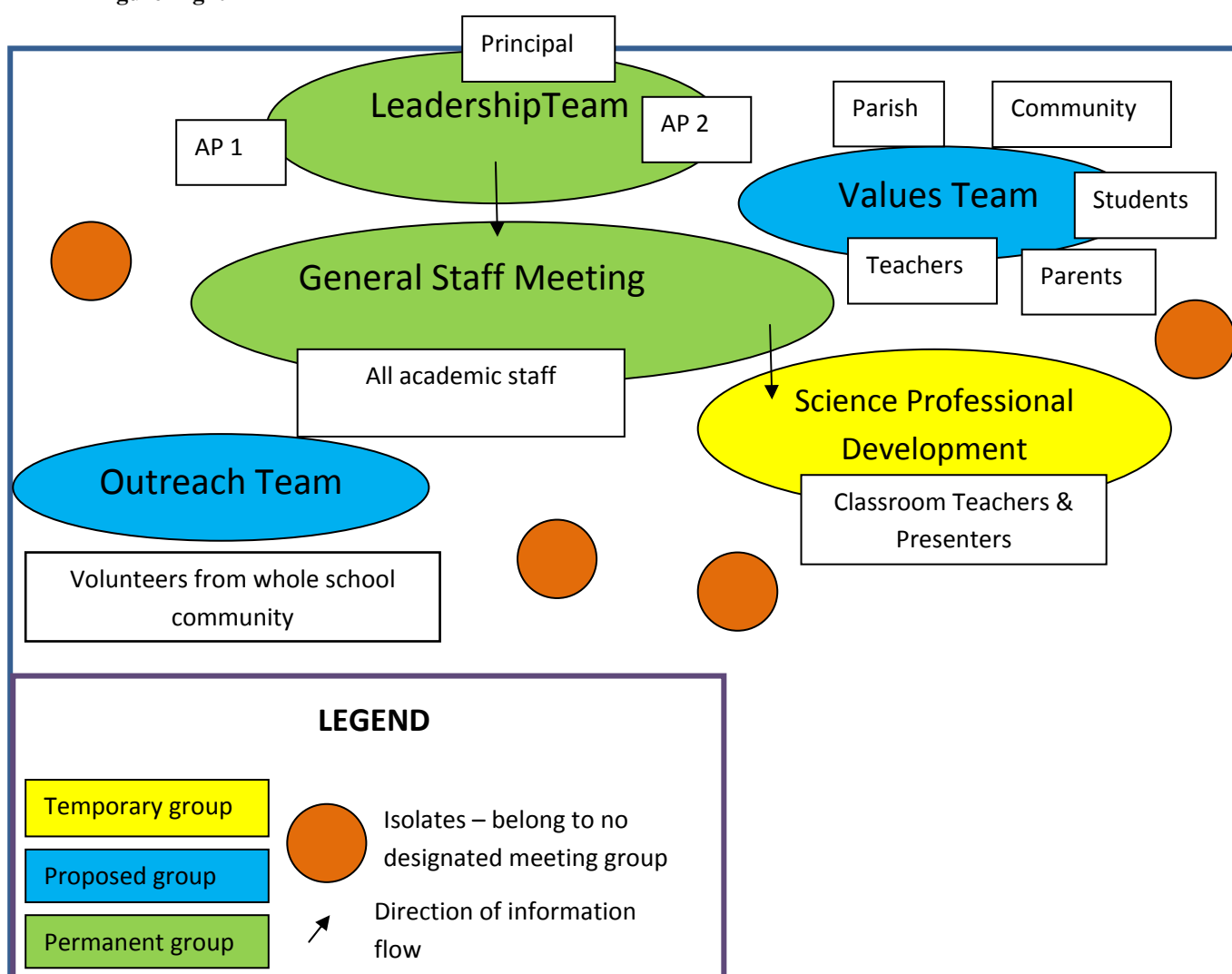
team. Frustration set in. We were repeatedly thanked for our valuable input and told what a great job we were doing but when finally asked why nothing we had worked for was becoming a reality the deputy principal, a hearty, personable fellow, slapped us on our collective back and smiled conspiratorially. *“Well, ya know, ya can’t always get whatcha want! Ha ha ha!”* We quietly disbanded, acquiescing with that most Australian of traits, cynical realism, described more eloquently by social commentator, Mungo McCullum, as recognising that inevitably “the bastards are always going to win.” (in Feik, 2010, p. 44). Nobody asked where we went.

What becomes clearer to me, as I listen to the Leadership Team, is that organisational structures captured in the mind, drawn on paper, don’t necessarily have a heart-beat in reality. The values team at Beachlands has never met; the general staff meeting has no purpose beyond dealing with the day-to-day problems that arise and the need to find something to talk about in meetings. The outreach team has put up the list of birthdays for the year so their job is over for the time-being and all through the organisation float the many completely unconnected actors who attend no meetings, belong to no group, and work in splendid isolation unaware that actions they choose to take may, in fact, cause ripples that impact on the work being done by others in the school. Take, for example, the part time teacher, we’ll call her Rachael, who doesn’t work on staff meeting days but is expected to implement initiatives decided on in staff meetings. She doesn’t work on the days her co-teacher works so there’s no communication there. In fact, according to both teachers, they don’t get on. The Assistant Principals tell me that Rachael is a problem but no one quite knows what to do about her. She’s outspoken and wields a lot of power; so no one is prepared to cross her, including the Principal. She’s one to go to the union at the drop of a hat if she thinks her rights are being violated so she gets away with murder. Rachael, or someone like her, exists in most schools in some form or another. She exists outside the traditional organisational framework due to either her status as a long-timer or her work days that don’t coincide with meeting days. Rachael, therefore, remains largely uninformed at a time when “we are faced with a critical need to address the ways in which information is generated and distributed to inform, enlighten and shape decision making in a complex work environment” (Cook, Noyes and Masakiwski, 2007, p. xxxi).

I leave the dilemma of Rachael, for a moment, and return to the job I have in front of me - trying to create a picture of what the organisation at Beachlands looks like. The leadership team considers my drawing and reasons why some groups should remain in the structure despite never meeting together. We agree, for now, that the current structure looks like Figure Eight below; for now we agree that even though the groups don't necessarily meet or make decisions it's enough to know they could. We agree that the isolates are a problem but for now we have no immediate solution to get them connected. The values team and the outreach team sit waiting expectantly for nascent possibilities.

Beachlands – Organisational structure for Meetings - 11/02/08

Figure Eight



How do schools organise to make decisions? What is the purpose of meeting together? Who makes decisions about what work is done in the school? At Beachlands (and all other schools I visited during the two years of data gathering and coaching) meetings were organised via a traditional, top-down, hierarchical structure. All schools expressed frustration at the grab bag approach to decision making where, more often than not, the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is up to; where few individuals do most of the work and where a bulk of the staff comply or *die* - as ineffectual as our laminated mission statement. Meetings are held because, well, that's what you do, decisions are made...uh...somewhere, and information flows in the most unexpected of patterns gathering the debris of gossip and misinformation along the way that distorts the capacity of the organisation to create shared meanings. Organising in such a way has almost become a ritual rather than a mandate for effective decision making enabling action (Smith, 1999). As Hoch and Kunreuther explain, "most of us don't make good decisions but few of us are aware of this fact" (2001, p. 2). I would add that most schools don't have systems and processes in place to enable good decision making but few realise that they have the power to do something about it.

Decisions blowing in the wind

Kinchloe believes that the role of the teacher in critical post-modern educational institutions is conceptually "an autonomous one that is free from the tyranny of institutionally imposed curricula that allow little professional latitude" (1993 p.218). Conceptually I agree that it shouldn't be too difficult to acknowledge that teachers could come together, free from tyranny, to determine the best course of action to take in an environment of increasingly competing demands (Apple & Beane, 1995)- demands that are, on the one hand, determined to drag educational intuitions in Australia back into a glorious bygone era of *readin', ritin' 'n' rithmetic* and, on the other, respond to employers who say they value employees who are innovative, creative and communicatively competent. It shouldn't be difficult to agree that teachers could and should play a significant role in the processes of decision making but the reality is somewhat different.

The journey from the kitchen of policy making to the table of the classroom most often leaves out a vital ingredient in the education revolution⁴³ banquet; teachers' capacity to engage together in collegial inquiry, make decisions that impact their work and be accountable to them. The practice of coming to shared understandings about their work is hampered by a lack of trust in teachers' capability to make decisions about their work and a lack of transparency and coherence about where decisions are actually made.

Be it via external policy drives or internal politics, teachers continue to be *told* what to do in the absence of purposeful, surefooted, informed practice as they go about their work, responding to the vagaries of policy with seemingly little capacity to affect them. The contradiction that exists between teachers wanting to have a greater say about their work, and an immobilising propensity to "willingly acquiesce to authority even when it has been blatantly arbitrary and unjust" (MacCallum in Feik, 2010, p. 32) creates a culture ripe for exploitation by the political sphere.

Gadamer points out that, as human beings, we do not agree on how we understand things which is why we need to come together to converse about them (cited in Dostal, 2002). Conversing about their work and the impact of conditions on it is but a dream in many schools as teachers go about their day fulfilling the requirements of imposed policy; the understanding of which is as incongruent as a barista's notion of what defines a long macchiato (short glass or tall, one shot or two, topped up or not; I never know what I'm going to end up with so, more often than not, I stick to the default long black). Despite the decade-long journey into outcomes based education, many teachers are still struggling with the subversive impact of an educational system's role as both an advocate for 21st Century innovation and a "cultural broker of passivity and resignation" (Kinchloe, 1993, p. 218). Political hyperbole of doubtful expediency creates barriers that "limit the capacity of schools to make decisions" based on the unique nature of its environment and its stakeholder needs (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008, p.167).

⁴³ Building the Education Revolution is a phrase repeated by the Federal Deputy Leader of the Labor Party to describe a nation building exercise aimed at stimulating the economy after the 2009 Global Financial Crisis. The term has been expanded to include any education initiative forced on schools, from the Myschools website to the National Curriculum.

When I think of schools under these conditions I'm reminded of a poem my classes loved to perform at assembly. It never failed to amuse and entertain the parents, children and teachers alike but none-the-less it spoke to me in darker tones that lay in wait just beneath the surface.

LOUDER

Ok, Andrew, nice and clearly – off you go.

Welcome everybody to our school concert...

Louder, please, Andrew. Mums and dads won't hear you at the back, will they?

Welcome everybody to our school concert...

Louder, Andrew. You're not trying. Pro – ject – your – voice.

Take a b iiii g b r e a t h and louder!

Welcome everybody to our school concert...

For goodness sake, Andrew. LOUDER! LOUDER!

Welcome everybody to our school concert!

Now, Andrew, there's no need to be silly.

by R. Stevens

Performed at a school assembly, the poem creates a community of laughter as we associate with the increasingly exasperated teacher spiralling from caring, to patronising, to just plain irritated. We've all taught that quietly noncompliant child and suffered the anguish of preparing for an assembly knowing within it lurks a great deal more importance on the school calendar than simply being *just an item*. We're amused by our reflected selves and we catch each others' eyes and laugh complicity and joke about that teacher who naturally isn't us but someone we know.

I'm reminded by Willis and Carden (2004) that images of teachers throughout the ages have varied from that of great storytellers to images of dupes and fools, to the enduring image of teacher as *a good delivery person*. So a different reading of the poem speaks another truth to me about the way teachers are viewed in many educational environments today, the image of understudy; a performer of doubtful talent. Invited to audition for the show, she's⁴⁴ handed a microphone and prodded

⁴⁴ I have chosen to use the feminine pronoun where I believe it enhances the readability of my text. It is not intended to be discriminatory.

onto centre stage. She might be given some coaching in the form of professional development in an attempt to “get the right knowledge in the heads and hands of the right people” (Elmore & Fuhrman, 1994, p. 9) and all the while the decision makers wait in the wings willing her not to stuff up but knowing that she probably will.

I walk into Beachlands Primary School on my first visit with the following words ringing in my ears. It formed part of a conversation held between a new teacher to the school and a system education consultant, relayed to me later by the teacher as an explanation of what I might be *up against* in trying to improve the way decisions were made in the school.

I'm sick of the teachers at that school. I've given up on them! Three years we've spent on that program and what do they do; go inside their classroom, close the door and do whatever they like! I spent weeks out there last year setting up an inquiry and they just sat there not responding. I give up! If I never see that school again it'll be too soon!

(personal conversation with Stephanie, recorded in journal, December, 2007)

The Australian

February 05, 2010

Students get new subject: the test

VICTORIAN teachers are being told to "explicitly teach" for the national literacy and numeracy tests as part of a drive to lift the state's overall performance with the release of nationwide test results.

*Justine Ferrari, Education
writer*

Figure Nine

The microphone is snatched back when we go silly as we self-fulfil the prophesy that teachers really can't be left to their own devices; and so another policy is imposed on us. Resigned teachers may be (on the surface of things), but without a voice to speak and processes in place for quality information to be cycled around the organisation, without having a place to interpret policy and come to shared understandings, without the power to determine the purpose of schools and how they might meet the complex needs of a world in turmoil, teachers still hold the ultimate card when backed into a corner. A co-participant described it to me like this after reading the attached article *The Australian* (Ferrari, 2010).

Raise the stakes! They have no idea what they're doing. Victoria respond by publically making the test totally invalid, so what...you can't compare like schools across Australia if they're coaching their kids! What they don't realise is that we all do it. We all listen to the principal raving on about how important it is that our school is performing well and it's crap because what he's doing is comparing me, not just the school, and when I get backed into a corner I'm going to make damn sure my kids do well so when I give the spelling test I go, "Breathe, you'd be silly to leave the 'e' off breathe, breathe." And I know my kids will get it. Or I say, "Orchestra, some people think it's funny when I pronounce orchestra or CHESTra, orchestra." Don't put the stakes up, don't measure me on something that is only part of the work I do and expect me to comply! I can look as though I am but no one knows what I do in my classroom with my kids."

(Co-participant conversation, recorded February, 2010)

When teachers are *not* free from the "tyranny of institutionally imposed curricula" they demonstrate a capacity to create their own "professional latitude" (Kincheloe, 1993). A paradox exists in schools today; perhaps it always has. We can view schools and teachers as compliantly doing as they are *told*. Or, we could listen to what teachers say when backed into a corner, or when they don't understand or agree with a decision made somewhere within the school; they have the power to have the last laugh out of sight of the principal and other authorities. In either case, the outcome for our children is probably not what we had in mind and clarity around who decides what happens in schools just got a little murkier. As one principal said to me:

I don't know where things come from sometimes. I'm often the last to find out what someone has decided to do; it just happens and all of a sudden, six months down the track, I find out that some decision has been made...

(conversation with principal, recorded November, 2009)

In this case, one gets the impression of decision-maker as *air dancing balloon character* - you know the ones favoured by car yards? They stand high above the ground and attract your attention with flailing arms and a body buffeted by the wind. "Wooooooh!!! Hey, this is fun! Whoops, didn't see that one coming! Ayyyyyyyyyyyye!!! While inside her classroom, tucked out of sight, a teacher plots seditious acts interrupted only by the fact that it's staff meeting night and as she made an excuse not to turn up last week perhaps she'd better show. Yukl (2010, p. 86) considers that "making decisions is one of the most important functions

performed by leaders” and that “Democratic societies uphold the right of people to influence decisions that will affect them in important ways.” As a teacher I was denied both the opportunity to influence decision making and the opportunity to experience what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society. As my co-participants from Beachlands and Forrester share their stories with me I can see I’m not alone.

Oh no...not another meeting!

It’s difficult to think of anything else that so many people do so often for so little reward or satisfaction as attending meetings. In every walk of life, in every corner of the planet, people spend a significant amount of their lives planning for and/or attending meetings. I’ve attended hundreds of them myself, from local council forums to curriculum writing groups, from school parent meetings to professional development sessions, from inter-school sports meetings to university moderators meetings, and in each I’ve felt the sheer bloody frustration that seems to be the lot for both the meeting organisers and the attendees. We say they’re a complete waste of time but, for all we rail against them we’re confronted, yet again, with “the same nagging paradox”; we can’t seem to do without them (Guitarri, 2000, p. 31). For all we agree that face-to-face opportunities to dialogue are vital for the health of an organisation the very existence of those meetings cause personal pathologies⁴⁵ to rise to the surface and old wounds to open up.

To get a flavour of what you might hear when questions are asked about meetings, my co-participants have the following insights to offer. We’ve already heard that decisions are not necessarily made in meetings despite the belief that meetings are held for just that very purpose but we also hear:

Email to all staff from the Assistant Principal:

*Good morning all
Our first PLC⁴⁶ will be a breakfast meeting this Thursday- 7.45 sharp start.*

⁴⁵ Scharmer (2007, p.313) refers to pathologies as the ‘shadow space’ of organisations that are present as institutional hubris; ignorance, arrogance, anomie, sclerosis, and collapse.

⁴⁶ Professional learning community

Response to email from a staff member:

Why are we having plcs as well as separate from staff meeting time? I know you are just the messenger and that we should not shoot you but...plcs were part of our staff meeting schedule and should still be so...

(Personal communication from staff member via email, May 21, 2008).

And from other staff we hear that:

Meetings never start on time. (It's one of those things that's) just accepted...you get there put your stuff on the chair...yeah, wander away and someone calls out at the staff room door...

Yeah, we have an agenda. Well we can put stuff on it but you have to go onto the Web to do it and it takes time...easier for general businesses...when general business comes up.

Ummm...no...Yeah the boss has an agenda and he just goes down it...down the list.

We just talk round and round in circles about issues and achieve nothing.

Suddenly agendas appear...from somewhere and (I think) where's this come from?

(interviews with co-participants, transcribed October, 2009)

My co-participants, including the school leaders, expressed a common belief that there is little that can be done to improve the health of meetings; decisions are made none-the-less so why worry. And yet they do worry even as a sense of dogged resignation becomes the core story line of the organisation where meetings are concerned. If meetings don't achieve any apparent purpose then that probably *is* their purpose and they may as well, using the terminology of the moment, just suck it up. Also making an appearance in the story line is an apparent lack of accountability to sustainable decision making that makes a commitment to improve the effectiveness of meetings pointless. If it doesn't work, well we can have another go next week...next term...next year. Mission and vision statements are a case in point. In both of my host schools the accepted practice was to *do* the mission and vision statement every so often, as a system requirement, but from that point forward they were rarely used as ongoing pedagogical or axiological drivers in the school.

Meetings, it seems, must be held but their success is sabotaged by the very people who believe in their worth and who want to make them work. On the one hand, the organisers rarely plan for effective meetings and, on the other, participants' behaviour derails the best of the organiser's intentions. On the one hand, the organisers invite collaboration and on the other participants just want to be *told* what to do. This discombobulating state of affairs is not the sole domain of schools and, over the years, many minds have been harnessed to the task of trying to solve problems associated with meetings. More than 40 years ago Saxon related examples of stockholder's meetings that turn into "colossal headaches...despite the most diligent preparation efforts" (1966, p. 132). More recently, Mankins relates a scenario of meeting plans that go awry that, again despite the best on intentions and planning, "is played out on a regular basis in almost any company you might name" (2004, p. 59). In my host schools the meeting conundrum is played out in predictable ways:

Scenario, Beachlands Primary School

A few days before the school year begins the staff receive an email from the principal asking if they have anything to go on the agenda for the first staff meeting of the year. Three teachers respond, one wants to talk about buddies, one the upcoming swimming carnival and the other special needs. The agenda is written up by the principal and emailed to the staff. There are 10 items on the agenda, the 10th being a heading, General Business, with nothing written under it. The other six items are contributed by the Principal under the headings; Budget, Ministry Leaders, Class Timetables, Sacramental Dates, 3-Way Interviews and Evacuation Drill. Under Budget there are seven dot points that outline the process that the Principal wants the budget proposals to take. The Sacramental dates are written on the agenda, the purpose and process of 3-Way Interviews are also outlined on the agenda.

The meetings begin with a prayer and then the Principal addresses each item, reiterating the information that is already on the agenda for staff to read. The staff sits silently listening as points are emphasised with the imperative, "You

will...!” When it gets to item 8, Evacuation Drill, the meeting suddenly goes askew as interruptions come from within the group, “...not sure if...where does... who is...I wasn’t here...” The meeting breaks into blather of cross talk as everyone tries to have their say. After a time the principal calls for order and moves on to the next agenda item, Buddies, and invites the teacher who put the item on the agenda to address the staff.

I just wondered if we’re going to continue having buddies again this year?

For the next 20 minutes buddies is batted around the group; over, across, around and down, with increasing hysteria. Like a party game where the objective is to keep the balloon up in the air as long as possible, buddies becomes a precious diversion from the trivia of being told what to do and everyone wants to join the game...at the same time. The room devolves into splinter groups; some battle it out amongst themselves, some take the opportunity to catch up on the holidays, some call for *shhhhh* as they try to hear the conversation, and others lose interest and settle back in their chairs to wait for calm to descend on the group once again. The conversation finally runs its course and the principal takes the opportunity to call for general business. Five new items are raised for general business and the next hour is devoted to largely “unfocussed and ultimately inconclusive discussion” about science, food, lunch boxes, duty, special needs students and morning tea (Mankins, 2004, p. 58). When the meeting finally breaks up it is with a sigh of relief from everyone.

During the two and a half years of data gathering for my research project, I had the opportunity to attend and facilitate hundreds of meetings in schools and the scenario above was a common pattern that emerged. My co-participants, from both sides of the meeting fence, related incidents to me, produced below as a snapshot of what you might hear that they said increased their frustration and contributed to a general feeling that meetings did not achieve what they set out to achieve. Meetings are seen as a waste of valuable time; time when teachers say they would like to be engaged in

more purposeful engagement with their peers, and leaders say they want to facilitate that very thing.

Meetings don't start on time, not everyone comes, there's no agenda, there's an agenda but no one contributes to it, only a few people get a chance to speak, no one speaks when they're given a chance, things come up out of the blue, all we get is a big rant, people don't listen, we go around and around in circles, nothing is ever decided, some people manage to avoid every meeting we have, if not everyone is there then it can't be too important, we don't know what's going on, it's all about management stuff we never get to the dialogue part, people use it as a time to socialise, we don't get time to talk about our work, it's all about data, the meetings are controlled from above...

(transcribed from recorded conversations and interviews with co-participants, 2008-2009)

Meetings, in their current form, don't seem to work despite the time and energy that is invested in holding them. More often than not, time in meetings is eaten up by management issues with little time left for discussion of curriculum issues, or issues of strategic importance, before the keys start to jangle. School leaders don't plan it this way. They plan for collaborative dialogue; they plan for discussion about curriculum and shared practice: they plan for professional learning; but somewhere between the conception of the meeting and its implementation something goes horribly wrong. And now, with renewed emphasis on school performance via benchmark testing, meetings are increasingly given over to deconstructing the meaning of data and how to cope with its all pervading influence. I swear, in meetings I can hear the teacher's mumble, like the title of the book; *Wake me up When the Data is Over!* (Silverman, 2006).

If we agree with my co-participants that we can't do without meetings then certain discoveries from this research might help schools achieve more consistent and satisfying meeting outcomes. But first let's take a step backwards to broaden our view of *the school* to try and understand the environment and context in which meetings are held and how stakeholders currently organise to meet together and

make decisions. After all, as Yukl (2010, p. 86) has already pointed out, “making decisions is one of the most important functions performed by leaders.” He reminds us again that in a democratic society we can expect that our right to influence decisions that impact us in significant ways will be upheld so how do schools organise to fulfil such an obligation.

Governance – Down in the engine room

Concepts of governance vary according to who is using the term. Apart from stating the obvious, that governance is what governments do, the term has most often been used as the *buzz word* of the decade - corporate governance - to describe the systems in place for decisions to be made in organisations that lead to accountability to investors and share-holders via the bottom line. The general assumption being that good corporate governance leads to good organisational performance (Sharp & Stock, 2005).

The Commission on Global Governance (2005) defines governance as “the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs.” The Australian National Audit Office (2007) considers governance provides strategic direction to ensure that objectives are achieved, risks managed and resources used with responsibility and accountability. Whatever its construct, governance rarely hits the radar when school reform is discussed despite rating as one of the three elements that Friedman considers essential to creating the “right educational system” (2007, p.343) - the others being the right infrastructure and the right environment for innovation. The definition of governance used in my research project is provided by the Kennedy Group (2005) which considers that good governance provides a framework for defining *who* is responsible for what and *how* decisions are made. In other words, “who is driving the educational bus” (Murphy, 2000).

Concepts of governance subscribe to the belief that the people being held accountable for something should have some control over that thing (Ingersoll, 2008) and is explored throughout this research project in response to the following questions raised by Sorensen and Torfing (2008). In an environment of shifting

societal dynamics and as yet undetermined levels of risk and uncertainty confronting organisations, the authors ask whether schools have the organisational capacity for making complex decisions. The Australian Public Service (2007) considers that finding solutions for these complex or *wicked* problems, problems that are highly resistant to resolution, is an evolving art that “challenge(s) our governance structures, our skills base and our organisational capacity.”

The framework for determining who is responsible for what and how decisions are made in schools remains rigidly adhered to an industrial organisational model that has long outlived the need for a more collaborative and participatory approach to decision making. If you look back at Figure 1 you’ll recognise a commonplace, hierarchical arrangement of how governance *looks* in most schools today; a structure that Fitzgerald and Gunter consider encourages acute power plays within the organisation “because the very nature of their organization places some adults in hierarchical positions to others” (2008, p.2).

While governance structures in schools look for all intents and purposes as if they are successful, it is only by virtue of the ad hoc measurement of such success that schools get away with it. In organisations such as schools (where the impact of bad decisions is never felt in real-time and is rarely measured, certainly not against the bottom line) the results of poor decision making can be happily distanced from any repercussions that may occur. Who’s to know? Who is to link the decision to use a particular science program, and then not monitor its success, to a student’s disengagement in high school science? Who is to draw a line from the classroom, where student interaction is put on hold for a term while schools meet external benchmark expectations, to the young man who is unable to collaborate with his peers in the work place? And yet we hear from many quarters, including our Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, that education is the key to the future. One wonders how the connection is made between standardised testing and a future that is anything but standardised. That educational key doesn’t seem to fit the complex and *wicked* lock of a future that is already here. In determining whether schools have the organisational capacity for making complex decisions, power plays are but one of the problems confronting stakeholders. The governance structures in schools are not put

in place for decisions to be made that lead to accountability and the question of who is driving the educational bus remains debatable. It's often not who you think it is.

When the leadership team in each school participating in my research project finish drawing their organisational structure, their engine room (agreeing for the moment that this is how it looks), I asked them to tell me why they meet; what do they have meetings *for*? Each of the groups hold regular meetings, many weekly, and each group that meets has a different purpose in mind - or do they? If we think of the governance structure as the engine room of a school then we're more likely to find a hissing, wheezing replica of Thomas Newcomen's Steam Engine than a well oiled machine heading towards an agreed destination. The mission of the school is uncoupled from the vision statement, a teacher's pedagogy is uncoupled from the weekly staff meetings, the leadership team is uncoupled from the professional learning teams, and all the while information that should be flowing effectively around the school is getting caught in corners and nooks, creating bottle necks and power differentials. My mission was to introduce a more ecological way for schools to organise and in doing so to build its capacity to "bear the burden of developing the capabilities needed for the public sphere to function effectively" for as we already know, Habermas considers it to be our job (in Wills & Cardin, 2004, p. 419).

The Opportunity and Sociocratic Governance

It's at this point where I can't ignore your question any longer, "So what is this sociocratic governance that you keep banging on about?" In the chapter synopsis at the start of this report I asked you to live with uncertainty while my story unfolded but I understand if your patience is wearing a bit thin by now. In Appendix A you will find an overview of the principles of sociocracy so you might like to go there first for the background information that will enhance your understanding of the following explanation.

I began my research with the belief that sociocracy would provided opportunities to restructure and reculture schools into learning organisations in a way that had not been done before. Since that first simplistic foray into restructuring Beachlands and later Forrester Primary Schools, the governance structure has evolved into a more complex and interconnected series of interventions. Never-the-less, at the end of my

time in schools I still contend that the foundation principles of sociocracy have the power to shake the system out of its lethargy and send it off on a more ecological journey towards renewal.

What is Sociocracy?

Sociocracy is a system of governance that uses consent decision-making⁴⁷ by the *socios*, people who have a social relationship to each other, as opposed to the *demos*, the general population. Sociocracy recognises the place of autocratic leadership and overlays rather than replaces traditional management systems. Everyone in an organisation belongs to at least one circle that has a specific purpose. Each circle creates its own policy (leading), does its own work and measures its own success. Sociocratic circle meetings are generative, purposeful, dialogic, informed, transparent and oriented to action. People come to the meetings fully informed to participate and commit to be part of the solution.

Sociocratic governance models itself on natural systems and originated in the Netherlands where Dutch peace activist and educator, Kees Booker, and later his student, electrical engineer, Gerard Endenberg used cybernetics and systems thinking to develop the principles of Sociocracy - consent decision making, circles of authority, double-linking and open elections. The model creates dissonance as traditional leadership roles and power structures are challenged while new forms of leadership emerge from within the organisation. As the model shifts and changes the way the school works, I engaged with the leadership team and other stakeholders to find ways of meeting emerging challenges. Successful solutions helped create a framework for sustainable practice and became an embedded part of the ongoing research project.

Doing it

You'll recall that one of my first tasks when I entered Beachlands and Forrester was to determine where the circles of authority actually existed in the organisation. In other words, who met together, who made the decisions and who did the work?

⁴⁷ Decisions are made by consent rather than consensus or majority rules. Consent requires people to explore their level of tolerance and allow decisions to be made in the best interests of the organisation even if they don't agree whole-heartedly with them as individuals. By giving consent participants commit to supporting a decision because it is the best decision that can be made at the time.

After discussions with each leadership teams I redrew the organisational structure to reflect the way information flow currently existed and how it might be improved by introducing sociocratic principles.

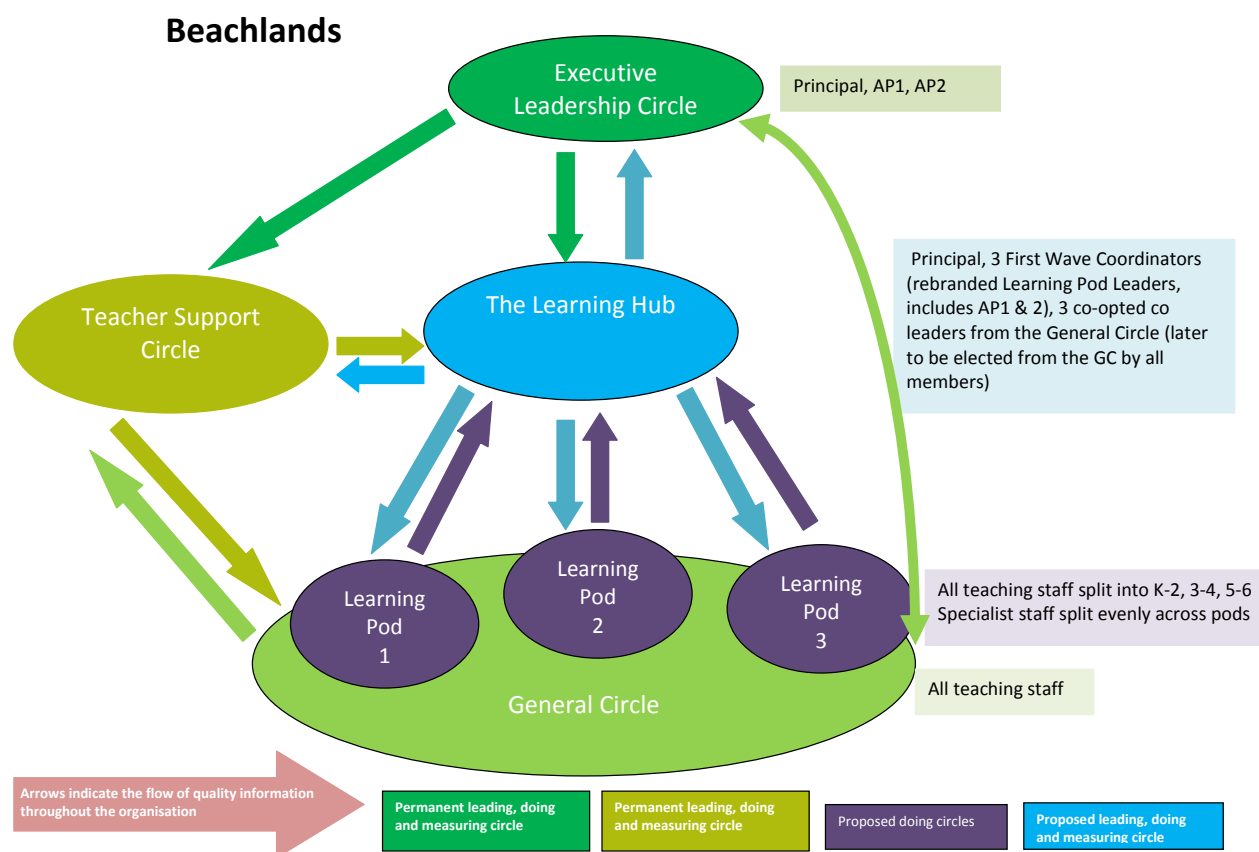


Figure Ten: Redrawn organisational structure showing circles connected by quality two-way information flow.

If you look back at the original organisation structure in Figure Eight you'll see circles floating in space, unconnected by anything other than vague information flowing downwards in a trickle effect. The principal and his two assistants met and made decisions that they then relayed to the troops who did the work. Or did they? What about those unconnected teachers who didn't make it to meetings? What about those decisions that were made outside the meeting format, seemingly by chance and suddenly everyone is doing the science PD?

The re-drawn structure places everyone in at least one circle and keeps them connected by keeping everyone informed. The arrows don't just represent information flow; they also represent the flow of people up and down through the system. The arrow linking the Executive Leadership Circle (ELC) to the General

Circle (GC) means that a person from the GC was elected by their peers to sit in on ELC meetings. They then had first-hand access to information and could relay it back to the GC.

Establishing the purpose of each group was another important first step and that was perhaps the most difficult one to pin participants down to - they really didn't know what their purpose was and you'll see how that impacted in both schools where the Learning Hub lost its way because members couldn't decide what they met for.

Decision making processes were clarified, facilitators nervously stepped up to the task and all the while I watched to see what was happening and made the necessary adjustments towards improvement as the need arose.

Conclusion

It all seemed so simple but the challenges we faced as the governance model was introduced were many and sometimes it felt like the house of cards was tumbling down all around me. It soon became clear that sociocratic governance wasn't enough to transform the sites into learning organisation, there were still important elements missing and as the project proceeded these elements were introduced, not as additions tacked onto the side, but as holistic elements in an emerging organisational picture. In Chapter 11 you'll get to see what this picture looks like. Now I would like to open the doors to Beachlands and Forrester Primary Schools to see for yourself what happened when teachers were given greater opportunities to deliberate and make decisions about the work they do?

Overview to Parts 4 and 5

The next section of my thesis is arranged as two case studies that each introduce the research sites followed by an auto-ethnographic case study related to that site. In Chapters 6 and 8 I introduce Beachlands primary School and Forrester Primary School and describe what happened as I worked towards answering my research question- *What happens when teachers are given greater opportunities to deliberate and make decisions about the work they do within a reframed governance structure?* These two chapters reveal what I learnt about being a facilitator of change and you will be able to judge for yourself how transformative that experience was for me and my co-participants. In Chapters 7 and 9 you'll then be formally introduced, through an auto-ethnographic study, to some of the people who had the most to both fear and gain from this research project as they tell you their stories.

The sites

Beachlands Primary School was the site that challenged me most as a budding researcher; it was the place where I had the most to learn. My research was undertaken from late October, 2007 until August, 2010. Both schools were similar in that they are double-stream (two classes of each year level) Catholic Schools with similar staff numbers. At Beachlands the Principal was in this second year of tenure while at Forrester the principal had been there for five years. It was not my original intention to work with two schools. I had planned to immerse myself in Beachlands over a period of two years but as previously unrevealed and unresolved issues at that site began to have a damaging impact on my project I could see that it would not survive the two years and neither would I. Part way through 2008 a casual conversation with the principal of Forrester led to me introducing the project into his school after I'd facilitated an Open Space event at the school. In Chapter 6 I describe the process of introducing sociocracy into Forrester Primary School armed with a new knowledge, a new wisdom and the understanding that I was entering yet another complex environment where the "rules of interaction are (were) neither stable or universal", "rules (that) can be volatile, subject to change as the system changes" (Davis & Sumara, 2006, p. 11).

My role, and the way my co-participants and I went about reculturing and restructuring each site changed and developed over a period of 2½ years. The evolution of my project matched my emerging understanding of many of the theoretical referents that would eventually form the basis of my research design. I entered each school not only as a researcher but as a friend, a colleague, a teacher, a parent, and a co-participant. My historical baggage of past relationships and roles weighed me down, particularly at Beachlands, and my capacity to affect sustainable change became increasingly tempered by my learning as I (at times) struggled and (at times) soared my way through facilitating educational change. The way my co-participants and I went about restructuring and reculturing each school became an iterative learning cycle where the impacts at one school helped teach us how to respond in another and as I eventually withdrew from the field my co-participants established their own ways of engaging together and facilitating the continued momentum of the system in the desired direction.

Auto-ethnographic case studies

Eisenhart (2006) informs me that the primary work of an interpretive scientist is to do ethnography⁴⁸. Chapters 7 and 9, therefore, aim to fulfil that requirement by acknowledging that the important stories in my project come from the people who were most impacted by it; the people who believed, as I did, that there are better ways to do things in education and they were prepared to act accordingly. One of the people represented here works the border in schools between the Principal and *the rest*, the Assistant Principal who is often privy to information not available to the other sides and yet, not always able to use that information freely in trying to bring about improvement. In various ways, she and I ended up in similar places in the research; sometimes in the firing line of both top down management and bottom up resistance and sometimes swept up by the synergy of greater collaborative efforts. The second educator is the principal at Forrester who will describe what happened at his site, and, finally you will hear from the combined Learning Hub and Leadership Team, at Forrester, as they meet together to evaluate what happened for them. These

⁴⁸ The people most impacted by my research included me and it made me question the distinction between Auto-ethnography and ethnography as terms that described very different things. Through discussions with my supervisor and with reference to the literature I have placed ethnography beside auto and linked it using the hyphen to indicate that the researcher is always present, no matter what we call it.

courageous educators, not I, are the real heroes of this story. While I was able to retreat to lick my wounds or to think more deeply about how we might respond to emerging issues, my heroes remained buried each day in the relentless machinations of school and system life while, at the same time, trying to redefine their roles within a transforming narrative; roles that, prior to my appearance, had been clearly delineated by traditionally endowed rules.

In Chapter 4 I described how relationships, rapport and positioning were uppermost in my mind throughout my project. I explained what form those relationships took, and how *working the hyphen* between myself and the Other became the most critical and complex aspect of my research as we negotiated the turbulent waters of organisational change (Lincoln, 2010, p. 6). My success as a facilitator of change is still under review but at least I can take heart from Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont (2003) who consider that we have matured in educational research from finding over-rapport an issue of legitimation to a point where we can celebrate the intimacy of our relationships in the research field. Relationships with and between each of my co-participants represented here are worthy of celebration as they mastered new skills of engagement and weathered the oftentimes dramatic imbroglio created by embracing new ways of doing and being in the school environment.

As you listen to the stories told by my co-participants and join them as they dialogue about their experiences I invite you to reflect with them and decide for yourself whether or not the disruption to the system provided them with unique opportunities to transform as leaders. For now let's pick the story up as I retrace my steps back to January, 2008.

Part 4

Case Study 1: Beachlands Primary School

How hard it is to escape from places. However carefully one goes they hold you - you leave little bits of yourself fluttering on the fences - like rags and shreds of your very life.

~Katherine Mansfield

Chapter 6: January 2008 to February 2009

Getting Started

In which conversations relevant to this thesis are related as the research process gets underway.

After my initial conversations with the Principal at Beachlands I began the year by introducing the sociocratic governance process to the whole staff during their first staff meeting. I presented a distilled version of whole system change into the one hour slot I'd been given, and at the end I felt like I had run a marathon.

Scene 1: After the meeting

Librarian: *That was good. Of course I had to ask questions!*

Paula: *Great, I'm glad you did. I want people to understand and the only way that will happen is if they ask questions.*

Librarian: *They sit there like stunned mullets.*

Paula: (smiling) *Well, let's see if we can change that.*

I observed staff meetings, looking at the way decisions were made, who made them and what power each player appeared to have, or want, over the work they were being held accountable to. Over several weeks early on in the year the regular staff meetings were given over to a science consultant who came in to provide professional development for a revised science program. The notes below were my musings as I observed the initial meeting.

The science curriculum

***Observation notes: Science PD 13/02/2008 Primary Connections 2 hours
3.15 – 5.15***

Organisation in year levels. Why? Who decided?

Presented by 'experts' Sci tech. Who invited them? Two teachers went to the PD and 'thought it was a good idea.' Who are those teachers?

The presenter said that the science program was collaborative, inquiry based, acting responsibly, historically significant. Why was this not evident in the PD for teachers?

Reporters and recorders were chosen by ‘the person with the pen’, ‘we just said, oh would you like to do it, or XXX you can do it’, ‘I volunteered after T said who wants to be recorder’. Reporters were chosen the same way. One third of teachers did not contribute to the larger circle discussion and only one third contributed in the general hubbub. TW, G V and C contributed most responses to the larger group.

One of the presenters was visibly upset by the lack of on task behaviour. When I went around to the other groups they were talking about personal things, sometimes the whole table, sometimes over the top of people in twos or threes.

The program has a CD and web access. There were excited ‘MMMMMMMMMs’ at this prospect...like ah-has!

I’m unsure if this is now policy. Unsure if this will become part of the school curriculum.

I interviewed individual teachers and from there consulted with the principal to determine what a more democratic, deliberative process of decision-making would look like in his school, and together we constructed a way forward. I offered suggestions about how the process could unfold and I was given access to all meeting levels. I observed the Executive Leadership Team meeting and the general staff meeting and tried to see connections between decisions made at one level with decisions made at another and what actions came out of each. It seemed my presence in the school was problematic from the start. I tried to overlook the problems, hoping that my different status and calm reassurance would diffuse any fear. I didn’t heed the warning signs; in truth, I was blind to them.

The Promise

With thanks to songwriter Chris McCaughan⁴⁹ who said it first and then I lived it.

I don't sit bolt upright like in the movies, awakening to a sudden disturbance that makes my heart race and my mouth dry. I simply wake; slowly becoming aware of my racing heart, my dry mouth, the constriction in my chest. I notice my need to suck in air, holding onto it then breathing it out with a loud sigh. I lie on my back willing myself to calm, to push aside the thoughts that are seeping into my will to sleep, flooding my mind with unwelcome thoughts. I reach over and make a fumbling grab at my mobile dozing on my desk. I squint into the harshness of the backlight; 12.30am. Oh God! I roll over and squeeze my eyes tightly shut. Relax...relax. Slow your breathing, push unhappy thoughts away...

Yes but Paula you know you.....

Shhhh...shhhhhhhh!!

Did you mess up yesterday, is that what's bothering you?

No...well..maybe..OK! Yes, I think I might have. It was like a minefield out there!

Ah ha! So what are you going to do about it?

Please, please, can we just leave this till morning? I promise, if you let me go back to sleep I'll retrace my steps and go back and try to work this out. I promise...

Rise from drugged sleep, flick on computer, open balcony door, pat Karl on way to bathroom, check email, talk to myself, bounce a few quick replies back, make bed, turn on morning show, iron clothes, check out fridge for lunch, stand gazing into space, make phone call to immigration office, find passport, let painter in, chat, laugh, make breakfast, tip yogurt down sink by mistake, damn that bloody container, eat fruit, make coffee, sip coffee, push

⁴⁹ American guitarist and vocalist

creeping thought away, shower, pack bag for uni, turn off TV, call Phil, talk to Rikki, give unwanted advice, drive to uni, log on, talk to new PhD student, chat to Badar, Google Amazon, get lost in bookstore, put credit card details in, push irritating thought away, open Word document.

Ok, I'm ready. I made a promise and I intend to keep it. Just let me get a cup of coffee...

I turn and gaze back at yesterday; a day in the field that, as you can see, I'd kind of like to wipe out. Did I say a day in the field? I meant mine-field. If you could see inside me and the people I engaged with yesterday you'd see the scars of exploded verbal ordnance still weeping from the battle.

My fear in looking back is not that I don't want to retrace my steps, I know I must, but in doing so my fear is that I won't 'get it' any more than I did yesterday. Yesterday, I entered a battlefield that looked like an ordinary school day. The victims of this ordinary day perturbed my sleep and demanded my attention beyond the meetings we attended, beyond the words spoken and misunderstood. I feel as though I need a degree in psychology to undertake this degree in education. Today, I feel as though I don't have what it takes to go out there again.

*The war will never end
It crackles through the speakers
I watch the landscape roll on by
And all the drinks that warmed me up
From my toes on through my fingers
I made it through this day alive*

Executive leadership Meeting

Attendees: Kate and Stephanie (Assistant Principals), Robert (the principal) Paula (the author)

Stephanie: *Do we have a meeting?*

Kate: *Who knows! There's no agenda so maybe not.*

Ohhhhkaaaaay! So there's no agenda again. Did he not understand when we talked about the importance of the agenda to this process of sociocracy? Do I need to go over that again? This is going to put a barrier in place once again. The agenda is vital to getting this moving ahead. I thought we'd gone through this over the last 6 weeks.

Stephanie gets up and wanders over to the principal's door.

Paula: *Is he in there? Is there a meeting?*

There'd better be. I could be home finishing that article I was in the middle of! I rushed in here late...how bad am I getting with time now that I don't work to a regimented timetable! I always seem to be running late; trying to fit too much into my self-allocated time slots.

Stephanie: *Yeah!*

Stephanie comes back to her desk and picks up a notepad and heads back to the principal's door. Kate & Paula follow.

Paula: *Good morning Robert! How are you today?*

Robert: (head down reading doesn't look up for at least 5 long beats)
*Well, Mizzzzzzz Joyce. It's good to see you're feeling very chirpy!
Aren't we all lucky to have your presence here with us today!*

The first bomb of sarcasm lobs towards me from the other side of the desk. Laughter successfully deflects it sideways and I watch as it rolls under my chair. I wasn't ready for that one. I'd almost forgotten his mood swings that shift from light-headed silliness, where you can't get any sense out of him, to the scowling, black silent cloud that fingers out into the deepest recesses of the school. The disquieting effect of his mood takes my throat and softly squeezes.

Robert: *Oh well, I suppose I'd better come around that side of the desk (he sighs). Sometimes you're a pain in the neck.*

Uh oh! I did consider that this might happen, this reverting to his, "I'm the boss here and you're just a worker," performance but it surprises me all the

same. I'm not working at the school any more. I was very clear about my role. Is he maybe regretting allowing me in here now and is trying to find an escape route?

My mind skirts around the bend

The day's started to unravel

Robert turns his attention to Stephanie and asks, "*How'd the meeting go this morning?*"

Stephanie: *GOOOD! It was really, really good.*

Kate's head rises quizzically as she follows the conversation looking increasingly puzzled. I look from one person to the other, mirroring her confusion.

Stephanie: *...got enough info from this morning for the next 3 or 4 Professional Learning Communities.*

s.....i....l....e....n....c....e

Robert: *Was that K, P, 1⁵⁰?*

Stephanie: *That was K-3 as a group and the next meeting, the celebration of the first week back is where...*

Kate breaks in, the effect of a quiet nuclear explosion having woven its way into her consciousness.

Kate: *So what's happening with that? Are you having PLCs? How does that work?*

Wow! Where did this come from? Over the last 8 weeks I've been meeting with the Executive Leadership Circle (ELC) and each week we've tweaked what each circle looks like and who is involved in it. This is the first time I've heard mention a PLC (Professional Learning Community). It's just popped out the bottom here, to my surprise and clearly to Kate's surprise as well.

⁵⁰ K=Kindergarten, P= Pre-primary and the numbers 1-7 indicate the year-levels in a primary school.

A sense of discomfort pervades the remainder of the discussion as Stephanie attempts to explain the existence of a group that Kate has only just heard about.

Stephanie: *Ummmm, this morning was just about getting back on track. We've got all this data and people were beginning to think about programming and planning for next term.*

Kate: *Hmmmm, hmmm*

Stephanie: *So that was just...the group...*

Kate: *Mmmmm*

Stephanie: *I've got to do a breakfast meeting first week back for 4-7.*

Kate: *Mmmmhmmm!*

Stephanie: *Need to look at...so we'll have an early breakfast and...*

Kate: *Ummmm...*

Robert: *Good*

Later, Kate enters the empty staffroom close behind me and slams her coffee cup down.

Kate: *What the fuck was that all about! A breakfast meeting! A PLC! Where did that come from? That's the first I've ever heard of it! You say you're confused at some of the antics here because you're only here at odd times of the week. Well, I come here EVERY day and I've never been so frikkin' confused in all my life? People never cease to amaze me. I shouldn't be finding out about these things in a meeting! And what about that comment about sociocracy! Why would someone wait to bring that up in a meeting? That's important and we're hearing it in a meeting and nothing is done about it!.*

I listen with what I hope is empathy, although I'm not known for it, trying to deflect the negative words with my shield of hope, not wanting to get dragged

into that oh-so familiar miasma of the school political battlefield. I fear that I may have gone there already.

The plan to introduce the structure of sociocratic meetings at all levels of the school, from leadership meetings to general staff meetings, was never going to be a reality. There was too much to do; too much to focus on in the school and making a commitment to finding a new way to do that was asking too much of everyone.

Journal Term 2, Week 2

Do teachers have the opportunity to dialogue about their work? After being in the school for a term and observing what happens in meetings, who influences them and what the role of the teacher is, I'd have to say no. I was surprised, however, where the content for meetings came from. I assumed that the principal decided what would go on the meeting agenda. I guess ultimately he did, but it was more by default than through any grand plan.

Six weeks into Term 1 a pattern to the meetings and groups begins to emerge that we rename into circles in accordance with the sociocratic model of governance. The leadership team becomes the Executive Leadership Circle (ELC), the staff meetings become the General Circle (GC) and, in the ELC, terminology is being used to identify the various parts of the meeting.

I expect, after a term, to see an agenda appear prior to the meetings.

Stephanie: *(preparing to go into the ELC meeting) Is he in there?*

Kate: *Yeah, I think so.*

Stephanie: *Is there an agenda? I didn't get one.*

Kate: *Yeah, I dunno. I haven't seen one.*

The group gathers in a circle around the front of the principal's desk and begins the opening round. They're still a little self-conscious about formalising the discussion that came naturally prior to my appearance. The bantering that started the meeting has been stilted into glances and false starts.

Stephanie: *Ummm...I'll pass. I'm still trying to get my head around this.*

Robert glances down at his notes. He has the agenda in front of him. They sit there waiting expectantly for him to reveal the meeting discussion...

In the meeting he says he wants the sociocratic model to be introduced as a matter of urgency. He goes beyond what I feel the school is ready for at this stage but I'm unsure how to proceed. I'm not sure of my role, or should I say I'm not secure in my role in the school. I've never done this before so I'm not as definite or confident as I'm used to being. I sit quietly and wait for my suggestions to stick somewhere. I don't want to be seen as the expert so I wait and hope that it will start to take shape.

So why is being the researcher so difficult for me to adjust to? Is it just as Doll, Fleener, Truiet and St. Julien, (2005 p. 104,) have described it – that in trying to explore different logics I have lost “a secure place from which to reason”? Why can't I point out to the principal at Beachlands that his desire to introduce sociocracy into the rest of the school is already problematic since he doesn't follow the procedures we're trying to embed in the ELC? Maybe I would have been better off working in a school where I knew nobody, where relationships were new and unfolding, where the principal wouldn't say one day;

This is an exciting time for us. I welcome Paula into the school and look forward to the work we are going to be involved in together.

And on another day;

Well...Ms Joyce! Aren't weeeee so lucky to be graced by your presence here today!

I laugh despite the dripping sarcasm and feel that knot in my stomach that used to form when I was his underling, when he did everything he could to encourage me one day and crush me the next. I'm unsure of him but I take the positive messages he gives and discard the negative ones. I think they reflect something else, something that has nothing to do with me and the work I am doing here but they spill over sometimes and dampen my enthusiasm and will.

I request a meeting to outline where I would like to take this research. We talk about the meetings and then about dialogue. There is no room in the meetings for dialogue, he agrees. He agrees that it must change. He wants the change.

“We have an urgent need to discuss the results of WALNA⁵¹. Everyone thinks that we’re doing a great job here. The kids are achieving consistently high when compared with students across the state but what they don’t seem to realise is that when compared with similar schools we are not value-adding. We need to address that.”

I suggest a model that will do more than just address this one problem. If we use Appreciative Inquiry we can reveal what is at the heart of teacher beliefs and understanding as well as find ways to use all kinds of data that teachers have at their fingertips. We settle on a plan. I can have 6 weeks to develop the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) into using data to inform teacher’s planning. I go away feeling as though I’ve achieved something.

One week later...

Wednesday April 2- no agenda for the meeting. Forgot to give me time but I introduce the AI in the 10 minutes left.

One week later...

Robert: *(Paula) you won’t mind, we have a person from the Water Corp presenting this afternoon so you won’t have much time.*

I mind. I mind because I want everyone to know it’s not me making these decisions but I have no way to tell them. I mind because I’m not sure where the urgency has gone. I mind because I could watch this research go nowhere and still write it up but I want an outcome. I want it to work. I want life to be better for teachers. I mind because I want to get on with this...

Paula: *Ok...yeah, that’s fine...*

I have no power here to say anything else. I make a decision to run the sociocratic meeting from beginning to end rather than go into the AI. The closing round gave

⁵¹ West Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment, now replaced by NAPLAN- National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy

me hope that I had made a good decision. For the first time everyone could see how it might look.

Trevor: (closing round comment) *I was really sceptical about this. I didn't put my name down to be interviewed because I thought...well just one more thing but now I can see how it works. I'm really excited.*

(Trevor later told me that he would like to be part of the research. He'd like to talk to me. He said that when I demonstrated how to allow all voices to be heard, not only the loudest or most confident, he turned to Kate and said, "Wow, I've been waiting to see this for a long time.")

The Appreciative Inquiry goes unofficially on hold. No one says anything about it but it's about to be capsized by IMPORTANT AND URGENT THINGS!

One week later...

Kate: *Hey, Paula, I overheard a conversation where your name was mentioned and I asked, 'What's that about?' and they said, 'Oh, the week after the holidays we're having a celebration in the staff meeting so can you tell Paula there won't be time for the AI'.*

The holidays come and I'm feeling despondent. I can feel the whole thing slipping away. I wonder why the principal doesn't take charge. I look at the meeting schedule for Term 1:

Science PD: Presentation of 6 hours over 3 weeks - no dialogue

Parent Information Night: No Meeting

NAPLAN results: No dialogue

Water Corporation presentation: No dialogue

As the agenda unfolds for Term 2:

Full day CPR: no dialogue

RAISe celebration: No time for AI

Guest Speaker: How to write a Mass – no dialogue

Who decides what is going to happen in the meetings I wonder? I was given 6 weeks for the urgent Appreciative Inquiry and now 4 weeks have been accounted for. More frustrating still is that meetings are back to the 'old way'. No agenda, no structure, surprises that come out of the blue, general business that swamps the meetings in a mush of opinion that leads nowhere. If I don't know what's coming next I'm not the only one.

Kate: *Where the hell did that come from? Water Corp, celebrating RAISe and now bloody Fr. Bob babbling on about writing a Mass. Geez... what happened to the Appreciative Inquiry? I don't know who is making the decisions around here but it isn't me!"*

Finding a way

I spend the holiday break deliberating over what my next move should be. One day I think,

Well it really doesn't matter what happens, does it. I can just write about what happens. Isn't that your question, what happens?

Yeah but I want to see it work. I believe in this, I believe that it will make a difference. I can't just sit back and let it gallop off like a horseless rider!

I could approach Robert with my concerns but I can almost hear him say,

"Things are always going to be more important than you, Paula."

I want to do this research; I want to keep my nose clean for the long-haul so I run the dilemma past my supervisor. Saying things out loud to someone usually clarifies the problem for me. He says something that sticks and fits with my chosen way of operating. I want to avoid annoying Robert.

"Create an alliance with someone in the school other than the principal."

Kate is the obvious choice as I have a long standing personal as well as professional relationship with her but I don't want to push it. I'm unsure how she really feels about this research and I don't want to make life more difficult for her at the school.

I decide to talk to her about my dilemma. I wonder aloud to her over a glass of wine or two.

We talk around and over the situation; we mould it and fold it like a Sara Lee strudel. She goes from “*bloody hopeless*” to “*give it up*” to “*I’ve never been in a worse school*”. She recalls that the last person who tried to work with the teachers gave up in disgust. Stephanie ran into him at a course and reported what he’d said;

“Oh, is that the school you’re working in? I gave up on them. I’ve never come across a more resistant bunch of teachers in my life. There was no budging them.”

I go home feeling a little wonky in the legs and a resolve to let it rest. Let them sink or swim; I can’t force this on them. But the feeling of unease reasserts itself as the sun comes up on a new day. What are they talking about! *This isn’t about resistant teachers. They’re not even being given a chance!* I argue with the image in the bathroom mirror, *this is about leadership or lack of it!* I recall the McKinsey and Company (2007) report that found leadership to be the most critical deciding factor in school success and agree that it is certainly making life difficult for me right now.

I lie awake at night thinking about what my next move will be. I run a couple of professional development days at two other schools and wonder if I should start again with them; cut my losses and run while I still have time.

Kate calls me up a few days later.

“I’ve got it! I’ve got it! I know what I need to do to get things going again. I can see it clearly so let me run it by you and see if it fits.”

By the time she has finished I smile and acknowledge that she seems to understand my research better than I do. I tell her this fits exactly with my vision, she’s the agent of change, not me. She’s brought me back to that fundamental belief that I momentarily forgot; if transformation is going to occur it must be from within the organisation. I feel as though I got dealt a lucky hand through her insight, but all the same I take important learning from it. Sometimes it’s best to be still. I’m not very good at being still. I want to see progress that constantly moves onward and upward I need to guard against a learned logic that tells me that I must see progress in terms of

demonstrable, achievable goals that can be ticked off as we move forward. I need to keep returning to my innate and recently reignited logic that tells me that the transformation will be more organic, more eco-logical; transformation will emerge *out of* rather than *because of* and that, as a system, our progress will be slippery and uncertain (St. Julien, 2005).

Sometimes it's best to see if ideas take on their own life. Isn't that what I want to see from this research; that it belongs to the organisation, not to me; that it achieves its own power and momentum in an autocatalytic state that enables it to evolve and develop in the desired direction (Mason, 2008)? Like turbid water that clears after the storm has past, I need to wait for the immediacy of a problem to dissolve into a clear pathway. I need to trust that the process will not always proceed the way I anticipate.

Kate: *The problem is that everyone sees your meetings as something different from **meetings**, if you see what I mean. What we need to be doing as an organisation is running all our meetings using the sociocratic model and then it will be clear where everything fits. It'll be clear that we're only ever delivering information, that there's never any time for going deeper into things. Everyone will see the big picture. Right now they think your meetings are different from meetings in general. If they recognised that this is not about you but about the way we can engage together more effectively no matter what, I think the dilemma will be resolved; for the time being anyway (she laughs!)*

As she speaks I make connections with my work as facilitator, as I enter communities to engage them in decision making about the influences that impact on their lives, they tell me their overwhelming concern is for the big picture - they want to know where they're headed. They tell me they don't know what the vision is, there's no leadership they say and I wonder what they mean about leadership. I think they mean they want to be told. And then I think they mean they don't want to be told at all, but it's good to have someone to blame for the lack of clarity.

African educator Patrick Awuah (in Cohen, 2007), claims that teachers have a stronger sense of entitlement than responsibility and I wonder how much of my

research will be transformative and sustainable unless teachers stop looking to be led and become the leaders. Awuah regards the question of leadership as fundamental to transformation in Africa. His definition of leaders is not about political leaders but those who have been trained to be the guardians of their society; educators, nurses, police. If we look closer to home and regard our teachers as leaders, what kind of leadership do we see? Do our teachers come out of universities with the capacity to lead rather than to be led, to be guardians of their society? Or do they come out with a strong sense of entitlement and little sense of responsibility? Do they hand the reins of leadership over to the principal or is it taken from them?

Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, and Kleiner (2000), talk about the Principle Do-Right model of leadership where teachers don't just tolerate but demand control from the principal. Are teachers demanding control from Robert at Beachlands?

I consider the dilemma in light of my research. I feel a sense of frustration at not being able to transfer my vision to the teachers so that they have a greater feel for the *big picture* of this proposed transformative practice. On the other hand, where are the teachers asking for clarity? Where are the teachers seeking to engage in the discovery about this something that might just help the way they do their work? Where is the sense of excitement at uncovering new and different ways of being in the world? I think about my way of being a teacher, I think of following up every lead and not being able to help myself. I think of myself as a learner and wonder where the learners are?

Kate brings me back to reality and I recognise a fellow learner.

"It's going to be great! It has really helped me to get a sense of where I'm going in the job as well. Thinking this through has made me see that we need to be more definite about our vision. We need to guard the meeting times we have and not let other things impose on the importance of meeting together and engaging in dialogue about our work."

She tells me she has met with Robert and Stephanie and outlined her vision for the school. As a result of the discussion, the weekly General Circle meetings will be

extended from 1 hour to 1 hour and 30 minutes. In this time, the Appreciative Inquiry will be reignited and other sustainable practices will be introduced over time. In addition, a weekly breakfast meeting is going to be held; one week junior teachers, the next middle and upper teachers. This meeting will be non compulsory and will be driven by the needs of the group.

I refine and redefine my thinking and at the beginning of term three I make an appointment with Robert to revisit the way forward. Throughout the year I tested and retested my right to be in the school. I wanted to ensure that Robert had an exit strategy if things didn't go according to his plan. He had been generous in allowing me access to the school but in many ways whatever happened, happened. I had nothing to prove so I was open to improvement. I sent emails to him to keep connected, only some of which were responded to. I received enough encouragement to keep going.

Denzin (2003) tells me that a researcher-as-performer must evaluate specific programs and make recommendations concerning programs and practices, advocating lines of action that will maximise participatory democracy, citizen health, and autonomy. Such a commitment makes the researcher accountable for the moral and personal consequences of any particular line of action that he or she recommends. I take heart from Denzin's guidance whilst feeling the burden of accountability press in on me.

Journal Entry, March, 2008

I have spent the last three weeks evaluating the way the staff meets together. I have heard individual teachers, "*Shhhhhh!*" others so that they can hear what's going on. Teachers have told me that there is no respect in meetings; people don't listen. I am meeting with the Planning Circle on Monday to make recommendation and advocate lines of action mindful that, according to Richardson (2002, p166), "*deliberative democracy naturally starts with proposals that individuals or their representatives make about what we ought to do*".

I need to find incidences that teachers don't see themselves as learners in the education equation. They see the values as they relate to students but not to

themselves. Look at the language used in documentation that excludes teachers as learners.

Don't feel supported professionally, don't feel a level of support professionally, arm around the shoulder is there, people indicate a desire to get beyond this.

What does Robert want? School has a reputation of being very caring but keeping up with the data, doesn't live up to potential academic possibilities. Wants to make changes, go on journey to change practice from '70s practice.

There are frictions where I wouldn't expect there to be frictions. Robert says the data doesn't live up to our expectations. It needs to become part and parcel of what they do and it needs to make sense. Needs to be driven...a desire to do different stuff and do it better. I've seen evidence on the one hand a person will be seen to be with it but on the other hand asks, who do you think you are? Withhold expertise and shut your mouth, who do you think you are?

Tracking the change

The project went on in fits and starts and despite the feeling that little headway was being made, changes were happening. Consider the following example that gives some insight into how the decision making process changed over a short few months at Beachlands as the sociocratic meeting structure began to take effect. In the first example I was an observer. In the second scenario I facilitated the group through the scenario again to find a different solution, one that acknowledged the complexity of decision making whilst striving for the best solution at the time. In the third scenario I disappear into the background as the working party takes over the role of championing the change.

General staff meeting, November, 2008

The Assistant Principal waits for silence then says:

Hi everyone, sorry this wasn't on the agenda but Karen just asked me to put this to you. She's been buying the stuff for morning tea for ages and she's fed up so she's like to ask someone else to take it on.

The room explodes into a hubbub of everyone talking at once...

Yeah that's a crap job!

I'd do it but I did it last year and I think...

I don't eat biscuits so I reckon...

Karen's done a brilliant job she needs to be acknowledged

Who's Karen?

I reckon we should go to FAL

What's FAL?

Hahahaha!

I don't have tea so I'm not doing it

Maybe the TAs could take turns

Maybe each staff member could do it on the week they do duty

I reckon the staff room is a mess

Someone needs to take responsibility for the staff room; it's embarrassing to take visitors in there

Who's got an FAL card?

Stop bleating on about FAL, who's going to go there anyway!

The Assistant Principal waits for the cacophony to die down and says:

Ok, so will we look at the possibility of someone taking on the buying of the morning tea stuff? The next agenda item is...

And so it goes. A typical staff meeting at almost any school as the conversation goes round and round in circles, significant only by the lack of decision making. Nothing is attributed to anybody, the hour is up and they all disperse. The sense of cognitive dissonance stirs the air as frustration with poor decision-making bangs up against a pressing desire to get out of there fast

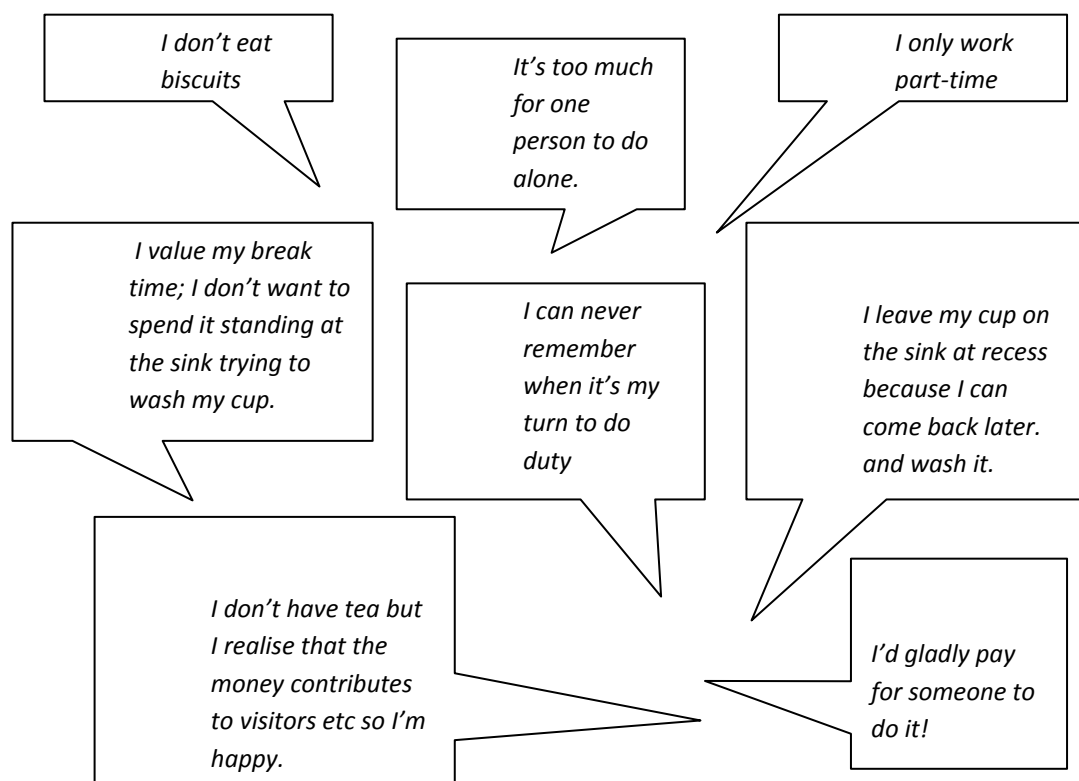
General staff meeting, February, 2009

The Facilitator waits for silence then says:

Ok everyone, you will have noticed that the issue of staffroom and staff refreshments has come up again on the agenda. Today we're going to use sociocratic principles to come up with a solution. Before we do we need to

agree to some ground rules. That the decision will be made using the best understanding we have at the time and that the group will agree to the solution in the best interests of the organisation even though it may not suit you personally.

I'd like to hear what the impacts are surrounding this problem so we'll use the picture forming strategy to get clarity around the issue. I only want to hear facts, not opinions or solutions at this stage.



The picture of the problem begins to form and the facilitator asks the group to consent to the completeness of the list reminding them that it is only in this moment that the list can be called complete. She calls for a working party to get together and try to come up with a solution to present to the group at the following meeting.

Later in the week a group of volunteers meet together to thrash out a *best possible* solution to the problem. The issues become the success criteria and the group takes each one into account as they discuss the options available to them. The pressure of

trying to find a perfect solution has been lifted by the knowledge that they will only ever find an approximation of a best solution and the creative juices begin to flow. The feedback has been changed; the system is no longer stagnant and impervious to adaptation.

General staff meeting February, 2009

The facilitator glances down at her agenda:

Ok, next item I'd like to call on the working party to deliver their plan for the staff-room issue.

A spokesperson takes the floor.

Thanks, we had a lot of fun with this one! We broke the solution up into two parts and we will be asking for agreement to each one.

Firstly, that the supplies are bought by co-teachers each week. Week 1 is Year 1 etc so that the weeks at the end can be allocated to support staff etc. That way the need to remember what week you're on will be less.

Secondly, that we pay an extra dollar a week to pay for someone to clean the staff room each day. Someone here might like to volunteer to do it.

"I'll do it!" Gary gets a big laugh from the group.

Yeah we figured you'd be up for a few extra dollars! Ok, I'd like your gut reactions to the plan.

As the facilitator looks to each person in turn to acknowledge their reaction she requests respectful listening rather than comments about each person's response. She then calls on the group spokesperson to go to the consent round.

Now we'd like to seek your consent to this plan recognising that it isn't going to be perfect for everyone. We have attempted to address all your concerns and we suggest that it's trialled for the term and then evaluated. I'll put a sheet up on the notice board in the staff room so as you think of creative improvements and feedback we'd like you to record them on it; so that this solution can continue to evolve.

That's great! Thanks everyone. I'm now the custodian of this solution and my team and I will put out the roster and do the other jobs that need to be done to get this underway. I'd love to see anyone who might like to take on the new job of staff room environmental expert!

Later, Gary walks past the classroom. *"Anyone got any cups stashed away from last year that you'd like me to wash. Eeew! That'll be an extra \$2 for that one!"*

For some the new process of making decisions according to the sociocratic principles started to feel less like a strait-jacket and more like a comfortable old coat and they began to have fun with it. Proposals began to be presented at meetings - *How can we improve the teaching of spelling at Beachlands?* and – *Beachland's City to Surf – becoming the largest school team to enter.* Closing Round comments changed from:

"The meeting was efficient."

And

"I think the same as her."

To:

Cara: *I love the way I can be open and honest about what I'm doing and how I'm feeling. I feel as though a weight has been taken from me. Instead of people expecting that I know everything about computers because I'm young, they now know that I have a lot to learn just like everybody does. And I want to learn these things.*

Sally: *It's great the way everyone talks and I like the way we trust each other enough to say what's on our minds. Admitting our constraints is half the battle in overcoming them. We've learnt through talking that some of the constraints are out of our control but some are our responsibility to do something about. We can help each other if we know what they are.*

Denise: *I love the way we're talking about us and not the kids!*

Alison: *I think it's fabulous that we've been given permission to play – to enjoy, to learn, to be amazed. The best thing is that we're even talking about such things as playing and being amazed!*

(Closing Round comments captured by meeting secretary, March, 2009)

Moving on

A story that describes a critical incident with the appearance of a mouse but the impact of an elephant.

Background

And so I circle back to the beginning of this chapter where, despite the significant successes we were having, the scene was set for failure as I struggled to understand the complexity of the task I had undertaken to explore what happens when teachers are given greater access to decision making. As teachers began to take on the empowering force of the sociocratic structure all was not well in another part of the school. Suddenly, the relationship between Robert and I deteriorated under my inability to clearly understand the kind of research I had undertaken and the impact it might have on each participant. My relationship fell apart when I stepped over an invisible line.

The following critical incident happened at the start of the second year of my PhD research project in 2009. I had spent 2008 at Beachlands, in the role of researcher-as-coach, facilitating change around restructuring and reculturing the school using a sociocratic governance model. Towards the end of the year it became clear that the way teachers met together was ineffective in moving the school towards a professional learning culture so, after reflecting on my interpretations and going back to the literature, I made an appointment with Robert to discuss the situation and present some options for further action (Gratton & Erickson, 2007). Emergence is a critical aspect of my research (Doll, Fleener, Trueit, St. Julien, 2005) and seeking discussions around factors emerging from the research had been an integral part of my pedagogy throughout the project so to do so in this instance was following my usual course of action (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Communicating for action

During the meeting I suggested creating a group that could meet to specifically learn about leadership to empower others in the school in an attempt to try and break down the culture of compliance that beset it (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). In response to a previous request from teachers that they wanted a way of appraising their own performance, I also presented a working copy of a framework for teachers to track their professional and personal growth. I suggested that the framework could be used to start conversations between peers on what they saw were both areas of capacity and areas of potential growth. Robert agreed to my proposal and I redrew the leadership structure to include the new groups and emailed it to him with an explanation of the structure for his approval. I left the selection of the group members up to him, basing my decision on the belief that he would follow the established guidelines of the new governance structure; that all roles, apart from the official endowed roles, are elected by peers⁵².

The dilemma unfolds

Prior to the first meeting of the Learning Hub I asked Robert to distribute the organisational structure and professional and personal growth framework to the new group so that they would have the chance to look through it before the discussion. An essential element of sociocratic governance is the creation of clearly defined information channels so I took care to model those principles in the way I undertook my research (Boyce, Macintyre & Ville, 2006). The first meeting of the new group took place in the boardroom one afternoon in early February.

Journal Entry, February, 2009

The Learning Hub is already seated around the table in the boardroom as I enter ready for the first ever meeting of the new circle in the organisational structure. Over the last semester a need was identified and the Learning Hub created in response to that need. While the governance structure created a place for shared leadership to emerge the dilemma arose around assisting these leaders to develop their shared understandings about new leadership models and how they could assist in developing a learning organisation.

⁵² Further information can be found in Buck, J. & Villines, S.; 2007. *We the People: Consenting to a deeper democracy*, Washington: Sociocracy Info.

I introduce the vision I have for the Learning Hub. I hand out an overview of the purpose of the group as I see it today and ask my co-participants treat it as an emerging conversation. I realised after a few false starts from last year that it's virtually impossible to create something cold without a great deal of thought put into it so I want everyone to get the feel of considering that that the way we do things is always open to improvement. At the beginning of last year I asked the leadership team to capture their purpose so that we could see how it differed from the general staff meetings. They didn't ever get around to it; it was too hard to put into words what they do so this time I decided to begin with what I believe the purpose to be and ask the leaders to adapt it each week according to the feedback they gather as we they go about their work.

I really want to re-introduce two messages into the Learning Hub today, emergence and new leadership. First that nothing is static, no fixed solutions, no clear cause and effect, no formulas, no quick-fix magic, no programs, no sign-off, no tick in the boxes. I want the Learning Hub to get the feel for complexity and emergence and to feel comfortable letting go of control. The second theme I explored is that of leadership that empowers others. I know for some of the people in the Hub, especially those with traditional leadership roles, this concept will be a challenge.

I use the metaphor of the 'master carpet weaver' to describe how a leader could be considered the guardian or custodian of the organisation. The job of the Learning Hub is to ensure that all the threads remain woven in to the carpet, that everyone in the organisation knows what kind of carpet is being woven. When new initiatives are being considered that they are evaluated in the light of what they may contribute to the organisation and that everyone is personally responsible for the decisions that are made.

I look at the faces before me and I wonder. I mostly wonder why they don't ask any questions. I can't possibly be that coherent. It's taken me a year and hours of study and thinking to come to the level of acceptance I have to new ways of thinking. I feel a little deflated in the face of such

compliant acceptance. I'd like them to at least ask me what makes me think that this is the way to go but no...silence, nodding, it's all ok.

Over the next few weeks the group begins to engage in deeper discussion which I facilitate according to the sociocratic meeting principles. At one meeting we get back to discussing the framework for professional and personal growth and there seems to be agreement that it could be a great tool to begin collegial conversations. I hadn't really thought too much about who Robert had selected for the Learning Hub, but a particular member contributed very little to this particular conversation, resisting all attempts I made to try to draw her further into the discussion. She happened to be Robert's daughter, Amanda⁵³, and up to this point in my research I had enjoyed many conversations with her, both formal and informal, as she had volunteered to be a participant in my research. What happened next resulted in me taking my research project out of the school and continuing it at another site. I never entered the school again after that day.

As the discussion moved on to other matters, Amanda suddenly broke her silence and exploded.

*"How can we ever do that? How can we ever open ourselves up to be critiqued by other people! I don't want to work with anyone else! I like working alone! I would feel as though I was **baring my soul!**"*

The room fell silent, stunned eyes turned to Robert then followed his eyes to focus on me. I was the facilitator. How was I going to handle this situation? In the instant before I broke the silence a hundred thoughts surged, stumbling and tripping over themselves to be the first to come to the foreground.

His daughter, think...think...what about the others...what is this really about...why isn't he intervening...why is she in this group in the first place...how did he choose..I should have...I should have...what could I have done...I need to make her understand this isn't a judgement...

⁵³ Not her real name.

I wanted to let the silence go on, not because I chose it as the effective facilitating strategy that I knew it to be in more reflective times (Creighton, 2005), but because I felt that no matter what I did or said, nothing good was going to come out of this. I understood Amanda's fear of opening herself up to her peers, it is a not uncommon aspect of school life that teachers speak collaboration but work in isolation and shut themselves away from collegial dialogue. But how had she been identified as a leader to bring others into a culture of greater collaboration? That was Robert's choice, not mine so had I misread or failed to even know about some of the deeper issues that were embedded in the culture of this school (Fullan, 2007)? I felt the power of a complex relationship about to take precedence over the work the school was doing and I had no idea how to deal with it.

I tried to take the conversation back to the purpose of the group; why it had been established and what the role of leadership was in a complex environment. I reminded the group that the framework had been developed at the request of teachers, including some in this room, during a former professional development day and it was always meant to be a work in progress; up for discussion, to be developed according to their wishes. I asked the others in the group if they also had fears they might like to share about working more closely with their peers. Silence...I felt a swirling of mistrust and fear pervade the room but reminded myself that I was interpreting the situation out of my own paradigm and I must use every resource I had to allow Amanda's truth to be respected.

Reflection in action

Somehow the meeting drew to a close and I left the school knowing that my work now was to go away and reflect on what had happened and to read the literature that I knew would help me make some meaning of this situation. I had to find a way to bring the project back on track as well as respecting the individual journey of each participant. I journalled the experience, spoke to my supervisor and I read; all the time trying to see what my role might have been in causing what had happened and what action I might take to help everyone, including myself, learn from the experience.

Several days later the decision was made for me. I opened an email from Robert that said he didn't like what I was doing to *his* teachers and in future I was never to present material to the group that he hadn't given consent to. I was stunned all over again. I *had* presented the material. I *had* received his consent. I went through every scenario as to why he might have responded so defensively and untruthfully and I had to admit that I had no good response, I felt the father/daughter relationship had moved the problem of change in the school to a place outside the scope of my project that would require different kinds of skills to the ones I was learning to lead from. I always knew my project would be difficult; I had accepted the fact that it would be a deeply emotional and reflective journey (Lopez-Zafra, Garcia-Retamero, & Augusto Landa, 2008) but the relationship between father and daughter and its impact on what happened in the school was beyond my control and leadership capacity.

The decision to leave the school was made after much deliberation. I went through every stage of grief as I felt my research project slipping through my fingers. I analysed the issues from every angle I could think of. I questioned my own capacity to lead and wondered if this was simply a case of me running when the going got tough. Overwhelmingly, I felt that by leaving the field I was letting the teachers down who *did* want to become more collaborative; those that had invested their hope that my project would provide a way for them to be emancipated in the work they did. My ethics clearance had not prepared me for what I considered to be a wholly ethical dilemma in breaking the trust those teachers had invested in me (Millett in McDermid, 2008). I felt sick as I wrote the return email to Robert thanking him for his bravery at allowing me into the school and for his generosity in allowing the access he had given me. I suggested it was time for the emerging leaders in the school to take the reins and my withdrawal would facilitate that process.

Conclusion

What could I have done differently? In that instance everything and nothing. I did not know enough about the environment I entered at Beachlands to be able to anticipate the risk and so I tripped and fell. Since then it has led to significant changes in the way I undertake projects of this nature. In complex human environments it is possible to predict some circumstances and put risk factors in

place to eliminate or reduce the impact of human action, but they are, by nature, unstable, chaotic and resistant to controls (Hannay, Smeltzer, & Ross, 2001). While this has been my interpretation of events as I witnessed them you will have the opportunity to hear from some of my co-participants as my project unfolds.

I had a crash course in educational research on the edge of chaos and it had a profound impact on my preparation for *next time*. It informed each decision I have made on a daily basis as I go into schools to coach and mentor educators through a process of change. My action plan is to be more mindful of the individual capacities that people have for change and make times to speak to participants formally about their experience of the change process. I document all conversations and send a copy to my sponsor with a read receipt attached. I have also learnt to trust the individual capabilities of those people who *can* work out of new paradigms and to relinquish some of the anxiety I feel on their behalf. Two weeks after I withdrew from the school I received a phone call from Kate who said there were a number of teachers who wanted to meet with me out of school. We met at a pub and at their request we have continued the dialogue and problem solving about change, as co-learners. The new group is called the Pub Hub and it has grown from the original members to include a majority of the staff at varying times. Robert's daughter is not amongst the group and, as with all complex issues, *that* raises its own set of ethical questions for me to continue to wrestle with as life goes on.

Chapter 7: Introducing Kate, Maven of ~~Change~~ Improvement

Do our stories evoke readers' responses? Do they open up the possibilities of dialogue, collaboration and relationship? Do they help us change institutions?

- Ellis, *The ethnographic I*, 2004, p. 195

Let me tell you right from the word go; Kate and I have been best friends forever! Since the day she first walked into Forrester Primary School as the new English as a Second Language teacher our careers and personal lives have been intertwined. I was the Physical Education teacher about to go on confinement leave so, in my first conversation with Kate, I gave her the lowdown on the school and the people in it; she seemed to need a bit of a leg-up in that department. Bug-eyed and shy she listened entranced as, even back then, I defined our relationship as me interpreting the field for her. We are as different as we can be in every way (you might say that together we make one great human being!) but an enduring passion for learning and a shared (dis) ability of not being able to separate the teacher from our other selves has cemented a public/private partnership defined by lusty debates about education, politics, food and whether or not parents in the 21st century are ruining their adult children by throwing money at their problems; something we both admit to doing at times!

As I explained in Chapter 4, Kate was not supposed to be a participant in my research project; that wasn't part of my plan. In the years after I quit teaching and signed on as a PhD student, she had gone from being the Assistant Principal at my last school to working at a university and that's where she was when I signed up with Beachlands Primary School. Kate and I had walked the Camino de Santiago together in 2003 and, on our return, we each decided to pursue a different kind of experience in education; Kate at the university and me hustling for work as I completed my Masters Project.

During the latter part of 2007, as I prepared my candidacy and designed my project to introduce sociocratic governance at Beachlands Primary School, Kate was preparing for something else. However, her increasing disillusionment with university life led her back into primary teaching and slap, bang into my research project. And that is where she'll pick up her story, originally written as a

presentation at the Science and Mathematics Education Centre of my university in September, 2009, eight months after I began my research project in her school.

Kate's Story

I will begin with a brief background of how I came to be in the place where I am – the Assistant Principal of a double stream primary school in an affluent northern suburb.

Education has been my passion for my entire working life and any attempt on my part to engage in other ventures has been short-lived and overshadowed by a need to be a part of a school. In 2006 and 2007, however, I did resign from the school in which I was also the Assistant Principal – just to prove to myself that I could, in fact, do something else. Very quickly, though, I found myself in the hallowed environment of the University of Notre Dame's School of Education.

I believed I had exhausted what a primary school could offer and what I could offer a primary school. By joining the staff at Notre Dame, my feeling was that I had reached somewhat of an educational pinnacle by lecturing in Literacy and playing a major role in the professional practice placements of pre-service teachers. My disillusionment (was it really mine or was it “out there”) returned to the same place as it had two years earlier – with classroom teachers! As lecturers, we could research, connect, instil a spark and watch our students evolve; transform in front of our eyes. But in their practices, they were so often, too often, confronted with a learning environment that would not have looked out of place in the 19th century. Prisons and schools, I have since read, have that in common...

Somewhere in amongst all that, I was asked to return to a school as an Assistant Principal. I declined. I had too many challenges I was facing. But then, I saw and felt my own spark, when towards the end of 2007, there began a movement in the system's framework for leadership – a Deed of Agreement for Assistant Principals and a new vision of shared leadership. It would be chaos and I wanted to be part of it! This time I accepted the job!

Knowing Paula, I also knew that this was the very same school and Principal that she had approached in order to undertake her PhD research in what happens when teachers are given the opportunity to engage in deep dialogue about their work and their practice within a sustainable, Sociocratic, system of governance. Our paths were aligned but where would they lead? Where did they go?

The prior knowledge I had of the school as I walked into the school library on that first pupil free Professional Development Day could be encapsulated in one word – beautiful. I had been told the staff was “beautiful”. I had a lot to look forward to. The Principal’s opening prayer contained these two lines:

“May the new beginning of this school year remind us that you give us chances to start over again and again.”

After my two year hiatus, I was excited, fearful and trepidatious (which isn’t a word but should be) – a niggly feeling of doubt.

“Is this really the pathway I want? Does disillusionment lie outside or within us? Is there some unfinished business; something I need to continue; a chance to start over?”

The day had a lot to unfold...

There are people who you know are teachers just by looking at them-talking with them. Teachers’ media battering has resulted in low self-efficacy and high defensiveness. That was my first overall impression of the staff. The Principal’s default autocratic setting swung into gear – and I mean “swung”- from light hearted jokes to “you will do this – there is no choice – this is an academic institution.” I noticed the sideways glances and wondered what people were thinking. Professional dialogue – lively – centred on trying to keep parents off the premises; staff parking on weekends or after school so that there was no danger – of what , I wondered, and was amused when a male teacher whispered in my ear,

“Well, the answer is obvious; don’t be here outside of school hours!”

Where would teachers go to the toilet as the building program had interfered with what had “always been”? Not the last time I was to hear that phrase but I did have to wait two terms before the word “lively” could be used to describe dialogue of a far more professional nature. I was an observer with an important role....so, simply observing was out of the question but when, where and how would I take the plunge? My doubts were further reinforced by comments from two different system consultants – one was reading the Curriculum Adjustment Plan, a new initiative for children with disabilities (!) but due to inclusivity provisos needed to be written up whenever the curriculum was adjusted for any student. I was momentarily stunned – wasn’t this a school which had taken on an initiative over the last five years aimed at differentiating the curriculum; at providing purposeful, authentic tasks aimed at targeting the specific needs of all students – data informed instruction was the tag. Weren’t all West Australian schools ‘levelling’ their students for reporting purposes but also, hopefully, planning/teaching/assessing at those levelled outcomes? Surely not just reporting? I felt like those pre-service teachers faced with the theory/practice dichotomy – the uni lecture/tutorial and the real thing. I thought my re entry into the school system was well timed but I felt very new.

The second system consultant’s comment was – “Oh you’re at that school? I can’t go there...I’ve washed my hands of it!” Everything started to fall into place for me – but I wasn’t sure it was the place I wanted to be.

Into this mix walked Paula with her Paulo Frière book under her arm – his vision of a pedagogy of hope had become hers. With my feelings of “no hope”, the term began.

Paula introduced the Sociocratic meeting format in first term after many meetings with me and the other two members of the admin team to explain the “leading, doing and measuring” concept. Meetings were also held with the previous curriculum team who had been responsible for the professional development of the staff. One member of this team withdrew leaving the only surviving member to take on the role as the first “facilitator”. The impact on the school staff was one of initial disappointment in that the previous year’s

format for meetings was being disbanded in favour of what? They liked the old ways and this information came to me in those first few weeks in very roundabout ways but mostly with me keeping my ear very close to the ground. Meanwhile, Paula was interviewing interested staff members and she became privy to a lot of personal information which gave her a greater insight into what had happened in the past, where they were now and what their hopes and dreams were.

But what was the impact of this on me? I was employed to be a part of the leadership team, the executive circle as it became known. The new concept of shared leadership was new to me; I did not have a duty statement; our role was the effective running of the school, but how? Sociocracy builds teacher capacity by giving each person a voice, by empowering the individual to put forward not only their own agenda items at meetings but also to put forward a policy proposal! To ask them to not only “lead and do” but also to “measure” the success of the actions; how could that be? I was searching for a traditional leadership role and I felt disempowered by the fact that there was nowhere for me to “hang my hat”. I bravely sought new people to take on the meeting roles knowing that it was not a “sociocratic” principle that the role would naturally be mine. Our first attempt at an Appreciative Inquiry in the “doing” part of the meeting was thwarted by constant interruptions and the considered opinion by all that, quite literally, anything was more important than “doing”. I was dying to “take over”. I was comfortable with taking over. Combine this with my earlier “pedagogy of no hope” feeling and you’ll have an idea of “the wall” I put up between myself and the “researcher”. “They’re not ready” was my beleaguered and constant cry. Her response was always the same – “there is no starting point, we just have to start and see where it takes us”. No starting point! Everything must have a starting point, I argued. Go to hell, Paula!

The Executive Leadership Circle met weekly and I was comfortable in that setting – it was the old power play that I was used to. My two co-leaders and I would discuss at length the day that a representative from the General Circle Meeting¹ would be a part of our group. We cautiously noted those aspects of our discussions that we would have to “leave out” for fear that “secret”

information would be available to the proletariat. We were so definitely the aristocracy. I'm playing with words here, perhaps, but more than a smidgeon of truth lies there. As you can see, there were many issues; there was confusion; there was unrest; but still the researcher came, always with books under her arm and something new to share with us. Something she hoped would ignite the spark. We argued, we cried, we swore and we hung on to what we believed to be true. "Imagine that there is no one truth," she kept saying. In my case I was clinging to what I knew, what I was familiar with; just like everyone else. Nothing too aristocratic there!

And so, as we do in times of turmoil, I started to read, talk and, most important of all, ask questions. The words in I Ching; "Times of growth are beset with difficulties. But those difficulties arise from the profusion of all that is struggling to attain form. Everything is in motion: Therefore if one perseveres, there is a prospect of great success" spoke to me and over many, many glasses of red wine and dialogue with Paula, I came to see that my role as the Assistant Principal was to be nothing more than to be myself; be me. Stop looking outside myself for change to occur. The answer lies within. How many times had I come across that line in my myriad number of personal development readings over the years and only now it was beginning to make sense?

Through Sociocracy, I have come closer to the answer. I learnt that if I want change in my school, I need to personally go through the same change in thinking – and that change is not only in my thinking, in my mind, but I have to believe it. It has to come from my heart. Paula has a great word for that, metanoia. All of a sudden I realised that this is the 21st century and these children at my school require so much more than the same old, same old. I realised that it was more than change that was needed, but transformation. Something better, something new, a metamorphosis. To improve student performance, teachers need to do the transforming. Don't hold onto the power, find the power inside myself. It has been a journey – more than a journey- a struggle - which these few words can just begin to describe.

The Sociocratic meetings merely made the connections, pulled the strands of our professional dialogue together. I knew the “what” but the “how” continued to elude me. This was a staff who thought professional dialogue was describing, in detail, what you had for dinner last night and what was the latest antic of your teenage child. This was a staff who, when the sixty meeting minutes were up would rattle their keys and gather their belongings. This was a staff who lamented the passing of the social committee meeting during school hours. This was a staff who thought planning a program in Society and Environment meant photocopying a line of outcomes and writing The Circus or, worse, Australia, above them. This was a staff who were ‘beautiful’ but mercilessly taunted those they considered weaker, despite having a ten woman pastoral care committee. They were having their own power games. If you don’t play the game, don’t enter the arena. As a consequence, those who had more than a passing interest in education, sheltered in their classrooms and, no doubt, waited for a better day.

An all time low and an epiphany in the same week? The last week of second term – just seven school weeks ago - the meeting facilitator resigned and a new facilitator tentatively stepped up to the plate. Not only did she step up to the plate, she also put forward a proposal. She had recognised a need in the school for a greater shared understanding of what the Plan/Teach/Assess cycle looked like. She approached me to co-present and together we devised a 5 session workshop on planning using non-negotiable components and tracking a pathway through those components. We planned for maximum interaction and the opportunity for professional dialogue in the “doing” section of our General Circle meeting. I was, at last, being me. If you had walked into the school and wondered who the AP was, it could have been either one of us. Both my and her transformations were just beginning and, at last, the spark ignited. Unlike our earlier attempt at an Appreciative Inquiry, there was not one interruption to our planned schedule. Nothing was more important. The teachers saw the pathway, noted the bridges that we constructed for them to pass from where they were to where they recognised they needed and wanted to be. They became self reflective and eager to

honestly share their insights. Their closing round comments were constructive:

- I feel very encouraged.
- I learnt more in twenty minutes than I have in seven years.
- I get it!
- It's great to be engaged in the process.

Those five sessions ended two weeks ago and professional dialogue is gathering momentum on a daily basis in our school. I see both formal and informal professional learning communities springing up. The old cries of “this isn't how we used to do it” and “there's no time for dialogue” (a favourite of mine) are being replaced with groups meeting to discuss new proposals, teachers meeting before and after school to continue the “doing” part of the meeting – teachers making their passions known and assuming the responsibility to take action. So much of the work of the meeting is taking place outside the meeting and encouraged to be productive and fun! Each day dawns with an expectation and a promise of something wonderful unfolding. We have a long way to go but I know how to do it, and I know that if I'm transformed (both in my mind and in my heart) then, just by being me I can assist in raising the level of self efficacy in others. I have found my role, my passion is illuminated, and I, too, like Paula, am beginning to carry with me the vision of a pedagogy of hope. I think maybe we're onto something here!

- Kate, Presentation to the Transformative Education Research Group, September, 2009

Reading back over Kate's story makes me relive those difficult months where the struggle to each find our place in the school was set on a collision course. It was easy for me to believe, at a distance, that teachers would embrace the opportunity to have a greater stake in the decisions made around their work. It was much harder for me to know the kinds of challenges that confronted the Assistant Principals who were so profoundly impacted by redefining leadership. I may never have known the difficult challenges my research project posed for Assistant Principals if Kate had not been so

strongly impacted by it forcing us to reassess both our professional and personal relationships. The story of her struggle opened my eyes to the realisation that we can only dream of knowing what underlies the actions of the Other (Denzin, 2010). I now understand that it is her words and her voice that you need to hear, unmediated by my interpretation, as she goes on to explain what happened after this story.

Two years later...

In a story you had to explain why people were the way they were but when you wrote in conversation you didn't have to do that because the things the people said explained what they were.

Smith (1943) *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*

The following conversation between Kate and I took place on Sunday, August 1st, 2010. A lot had happened in the intervening years since Kate had written her story, presented above, and I wanted to know what she now believed could be attributed to the introduction of the sociocratic meeting structure at Beachlands.

Me: *Kate, in 2008 I came into Beachland's Primary School to introduce the sociocratic meeting structure and to see what would actually happen and make recommendations for an improved way for people to meet and make decisions. Could you describe what has happened since that time that you believe you could directly relate to that initiative?*

Kate laughed and rolled her eyes heavenward.

Kate: *That was two and half years ago and an enormous amount has changed since then. Do you want me to go right through the full time?*

Me: *Yeah, I replied. Just give me what you believe you can directly relate to that initiative because my research question is, what happens when teachers are given a greater opportunity to have a say about things that impact on them... so I'm kind of looking well, okay, what has happened in that time?*

Kate began by recapping her entry into the school after two years at university. I was eager to move her to the time after the Big Difficulty where we almost sacrificed our friendship but I listened patiently while she found the best way to tell her story.

Kate: *When you came in (to Beachlands) and you introduced the (sociocratic meeting) structure and there was a lot of resistance at that time... but what I have seen... and of course there were all those problems to go through, and that included everyone, including me, who had to go through those issues, because I came in with the idea that an assistant principal was, to be honest, almost an autocratic leader. I could define clearly and state what it was that I really wanted to do. Since then I think we got it right, we had it totally wrong... we had it wrong for sometime then we got it right. And*

now what we have is a very sustained, what I would call a sustainable structure, but the meaningful, the professional, the deep dialog, the giving teachers a voice, I don't think that's there now and I think that was the initial aim of the (sociocratic governance) structure."

Me: *So what would you attribute to the fact...the structure's in place so what's missing?"*

Kate: *What's missing is that for an enormous number of reasons teachers lack self-efficacy and you can't just put a structure in place that gives teachers a voice without also building their capacity to do so.*

Even after all this time I feel a sense of frustration overwhelm me as I listen to Kate. One of my greatest challenges, in doing this research, has been how to explain the big picture to the people putting it into practice and how to stop the system evolving in a way that *is not* towards the desired direction. Many times I had to watch while the initiatives were implemented in ways that would not improve the work that teachers were doing. For now, I think I hide my frustration and continue,

Me: *The original structure had a place for that to happen... like the notion of creating the Learning Hub was to get those people who demonstrated that they had a desire to learn more; to learn about leadership, to do those things... that was in the initial kind of plan. What has gone wrong with that notion or is it just that people don't have the capacity to lead?*

Kate: *I think the people have an enormous capacity to lead but I think a lot of it, I think the majority of that, rests with the principal of the school and in our case, at Beachlands, we have an autocratic leader and that in itself has... whereby the very nature of the autocracy...the structure has been maintained, it's kept its structure. But, by the same time, the teacher's self-efficacy hasn't reached the heights that it could do."*

So the structure has survived because of the autocratic leadership! That's something, I guess. But I wonder, at this point, if Kate will come out and say what is stopping leadership from emerging at every level. There may be many reasons why people at Beachlands hesitated to put their hands up to lead but, in this case, the way it was interpreted by the Principal, the Learning Hub didn't stand a chance.

Me: *So what's stopping it?*

Kate: *What's stopping it is, first of all, we have the structure...the structure is fabulously in place. Then we have a Hub meeting and the principal stands at the door and says, "Hurry up!" Because as soon as you get in here you can get out. He does not believe in the concept of building leadership capacity because what he believes is that leadership resides within*

him. So the very concept of building leadership capacity, my feeling is, it doesn't gel with him, he can't see that possibility. So he uses The Hub as a vehicle for his autocratic leadership style i.e. He tells people what to do, "This is what you will do." And he might say, "So what do you think Kate, what do you think?" But not a lot of that, not a lot of what do you think.

My vision of the Learning Hub, and what actually happened at Beachlands, couldn't be more divergent and it troubled me that it might be seen as something I would advocate. The idea of The Hub had emerged out of a desire to provide a place to build teacher capacity as peer leaders as a way of changing the culture of schools from compliance to empowerment (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton & Kleiner, 2000). I imagined a group of *the willing* learning together to support, mentor and guide each other as educators. I did not envision people being hand-picked by the principal. I did not envision him using the Hub to promote his own leadership. I tried to explain,

Me: *So listening to my vision, if you like, of what I thought might happen out of this, and really, when I started, I had no idea, except for the fact that I felt the sociocratic governance structure would be a vehicle to give teachers a voice, and then we were going to look at what emerged. If a different kind of leadership was in place, do you believe that this could become something more than what it is at your school at the moment?*

Kate: *Absolutely if I was the principal of the school, it would look totally different. My preferred leadership style is one where I would encourage leadership capacity in others. I think it's the answer to everything that's wrong with the profession. If you're looking for professional dialog, if you're looking for people's...people's desire to really believe in education, talk about education, love education. I want to instill that love of learning in children; you've got to have that very, very deep dialog about your practice, that's not going to happen without teachers.*

Me: *So do you think teachers have the capacity to doing that?*

Kate: *Yes, absolutely I do, yes. Obviously, and I have seen enough teachers...*

The question of teacher self-efficacy is fundamental to my research project. It is the question that everyone who leads professional learning in schools asks time and time again. How can I get teachers to learn? How can I get them to want to co create a learning organisation? It is the question that Kate and I often struggled over as my research project proceeded. Kate vacillated between trusting that teachers wanted to be learners and believing that they didn't have the necessary 'smarts'. I wanted to

take a different view. I wanted to believe that the conditions hadn't been right up till now and that by creating the right conditions, teachers would step forward.

Me: *That's really interesting" Because we started this conversation with you saying that teachers... you felt that that's the thing that's missing is teacher self efficacy. So could you just clarify?*

Kate: *Well, my thinking has changed completely since the beginning of 2008. Yes, I do believe teachers lack self efficacy, they lack, for example, let me think that how I could say this. For example, teachers, they are not quite sure of what they are doing, they are not quite sure why they are doing it. They are not quite sure how they are doing it. I think they are far surer than they realize but as they can't articulate it and they don't have the opportunity to articulate it. An autocratic leader doesn't care if they know what, how, why, all an autocratic leader cares about is they do it, they do what they have to do. What's the question again?*

Me: *I was just trying to understand whether you believe the teachers have the capacity to do this if they had the right kind of leadership or whether you believe that they don't have that capacity?*

Kate: *I believe they do have the capacity.*

Me: *But, with the right kind of leadership?*

Kate: *With the right conditions.*

I smiled. I wanted to ask if she thought of leadership as a condition but I left it at that. I just smiled.

At this point it may be important to point out that while Kate was working away at Beachlands, exploring the possibilities that had been opened up by the research initiative; I was working with my co-participants at Forrester. The research project continued to evolve and, in keeping with my methodology, we constantly had our eyes and ears open to emerging conditions and, in the Learning Hubs, we discussed possible responses to what we were seeing. The question of teacher self-efficacy kept raising its head in every conversation. Many teachers had wanted to join the Learning Hub, to learn about leadership and to lead professional conversations, but they still found it difficult to step out above the crowd and lead their peers; a view supported by McKenzie and Scheurich (2008) who found that teachers don't regard themselves as leaders and feel uncomfortable talking about teaching with their peers.

I thought back to the facilitator's courses I had taken, in 2006 and 2007, and how they had opened my eyes to a different way of engaging with people so I suggested to my co-participants that a course, specifically designed for teacher leaders, might provide a way forward. The Learning Hub at a school not represented here in this project agreed and the principal, following a suggestion I made to leverage from an opportunity to network with other educators in the region, sent an invitation out to other schools to join us. I created the course and a small group of 10 educators from 4 different schools began meeting every two weeks, for 10 X 2 hour sessions, beginning in Term 1, 2010. The group included both Assistant Principals from Beachlands. I asked Kate to explain what value she saw in the facilitator's course in terms of building teacher self efficacy and helping the organisation to move forward.

Kate: *Absolutely. I think that with the structure...at the moment I look at it... the leader is being particularly autocratic and it's very...it's amazing how a structure like that can depend on the leader. But most definitely I believe that through your facilitation course, through a much more clearly stated strategic plan in school I believe that we could build teacher capacity. I see so many hints of it during every single day that teachers have the capacity to do exactly what it is but we do not have the school environment for them to flourish. The structure is in place, absolutely, but the environment in the school does not allow them to... I'll give you an example. I notice that giving people a voice that idea that if we're passionate about education, we care about it, we talk about it, we dialog deeply about it, I see that outside of the meeting structure because outside of the meeting structure is where the principal is not. So, for example, if we would discuss an innovative strategy for...and we would discuss that deeply and decide how we could work through the difficulties...all those things that would be wonderful if it could be in the discussion section of the meeting. But it's not there because people are fearful that the principal wouldn't approve the idea. And I think that it's not that teachers don't have the capacity for deep dialog it's not that they don't have the capacity for raising points but they will do it in a place where they feel safe and because of the principal's influence in the meeting structure they don't feel safe.*

It's a little bit like, for example, the Executive Leadership Circle (ELC) meeting. So that idea that you've got a transparent system where you have a member of the staff who is there at that time.

Here, Kate refers to the aspect of sociocratic governance where members of a lower circle participate as full members of a circle higher up than them in the organisational structure. In this case, a teacher from the General Circle (all teachers at the school) had been elected to participate in the ELC. The idea is to improve the transparency of the organisation, to ensure that all voices are being heard at each

level and to provide feedback loops in order to improve the quality of communication. Kate explains how it has evolved at Beachlands.

Kate: *Okay, then what the principal has done is he has arranged for the two assistant principals, I'm one; to meet 20 minutes before that person comes into the room. The door is shut and that person has to knock on the door and open the door to see these three people deep in dialog... comes in, change of topic. Yet you can see the structure's all there, we've got somebody coming in but you can see the transparency, or the reason for having that person there, is not. So when that person then goes to the General Circle meeting, and reports back on what was said in the Executive Leadership meeting, they're only giving half the picture. And again, going back, that person would have the full capacity to engage fully in the entire executive meeting.*

So is this the real reason why change in schools is so hard won? Quinn (1996) considers that it is a natural state of affairs for organisations to be resistant to change but what Kate was saying rang so true for me and reaffirmed my belief that if teachers were given the right kind of opportunities they would become more engaged as learners. I wondered if teachers would ever be *allowed* to fly. I wondered about whose interests were being served by keeping teachers partially informed and whose interests might be served by allowing teachers access to something more (Grundy, 1987). For now, it was time to move the conversation on.

Me: *Okay, so I want to come back to that a little bit later on but for now... mid-way through 2008 you presented your version of what was happening to a group of people at the university. And in that time it was initially pretty traumatic for you (and me... laughter...) so thinking back to that time and thinking about allowing teachers into the Leadership Circle how did you do... can you think back to how you might have felt about that at the time?*

Kate: *Yes, at the time, as I said earlier, I came out of the university setting with a feeling like being in a university is the pinnacle of being in education and we have the answers. We were giving all this fabulous good news to these students where they went into schools and what they were confronted with ... nothing like what they were learning at the university. And so, I had that mindset when I walked into that school. When I did that the only handover comment that I was given was, Kate you will love this school because the staff are beautiful and I walked into the school on that very first day and we had, if I recall, we had to be first day at professional development, which was great because I came in... And all matters of things were discussed but what was just... by the end of the day I had no reason to change my mind about how... as to the teachers there because it was all about, for example, teacher's toilets. Where a teacher is going to go the toilet...that's about as deep, actually, as the dialog got that day. And all I could think of was, "Oh!*

This is hideous; I need to do something about these people.” I came in with quite a superior feeling about myself as far as my role went.

The difficulty that I had then, when the sociocratic structure came into place was that it promoted a democratic voice and I really didn’t value other voices at that time. I didn’t think that they had a clue quite frankly. So their voices were made like... if they did speak I actually didn’t want to hear it because they were too stupid for me, their practices were too stupid. Like the most... in the first semester that I was at that school the conversation never in the staff went anywhere close to education and centered on what people had for dinner the night before. And I’m thinking to myself why would you give people a voice because all they are going to talk about is toilets and recipes and I really did not believe... and I was so wrong and I was to be proven wrong that I did not believe that their voice was worth it, was worth listening to.

I couldn’t help feeling a pain in my chest, at this point in the conversation. Is that what the Principal believed about me when he said, “Paula’s opinion doesn’t matter”? Did he think I was too stupid? Did he not value my voice and what I had to say?

Me: *Okay, So things have changed considerably since then. So what has changed in you and why?*

Kate: *Me? I...over time a lot of things changed in the school. I think initially one of the most important things that changed in that school was the fact that there was a new admin team that was totally different from the admin team that was there before. And so, as a result of that, half the staff left. I think that had a major impact on the changes. Secondly, was most definitely the sociocratic system of governance that we had at the school because slowly what happened was that people started to really value the meeting format and their comments were...the dialog was so much richer than it ever had been but it took a long time, it took a very long time.*

That sense of frustration again... Prior to introducing my research project into each site, and at regular intervals throughout, I stressed the need for a long-term commitment to this kind of change. And yet, a sense of urgency often pushed essential elements of the design out of the picture as each site went for short term gains. The opening round was abandoned, the agenda wasn’t sent out prior to a meeting, and general business was allowed to creep back, taking up valuable learning time. To my co-participants they seemed like such little things and yet I understood them to have a big impact on keeping the organisation stuck. My frustration surfaced when I heard their frustration and I wanted to say, “But can’t you see you’ve just

changed the rules back again! What did you expect?" But back to Kate, I wanted to hear about her transformation.

Kate: *The changes in me? Maybe there were always...maybe the dialog was always there but I wasn't hearing it. Maybe it was a different set of people talking, maybe it was a style of leadership that I brought to that staff, or maybe it was the impact of my leadership one on one with people. For example, I can remember people had no idea how to program, and I went through the planning, and people then, just by having that planning structure in place, they started to talk about, okay, what goes into that plan. So here the dialog changed and I think that was 50% them and 50% me. Yet their dialog changed but also I was listening and maybe I wasn't listening before. And to be perfectly honest, these days, the way I came out of university thinking when you finished teaching in the morning and you come into the staff room you should be ready for some deep professional dialog, these days I believe that's true, I'm probably more likely to talk about what I had for dinner the night before than to talk about professional dialog. So I have changed in a...I became them and they became me. I think that was more realistic."*

Mackay (1994, p. 143) claims that our reluctance to listen is legendary so Kate is not alone in revealing that aspect of her leadership. But I wanted to know more about the actual restructuring of the organisation and if it allowed greater learning to happen. It was my original belief that it would but did it really happen that way? I asked;

Me: *So do you think that the actual format of the Learning Pods has created more of an opportunity for deeper dialog that actually happened before?*

Kate: *The Pods have had an amazing impact because it's...and the changes that are seen in the Pods and that the impact of those on the dialog in the school that would be the single biggest thing that has altered. The fact that we're able to meet in a group that's more manageable for people to speak. I think that in itself...by not having the whole group there teacher self-efficacy has improved in that way and in that they are happy to speak up. The other reason is because I was actually... it is safe definitely. I lead the upper Pod and by leading the upper Pod I was able to build a little bit more leadership capacity in people than I am able to in The Hub. So in The Hub I can think of how I can build leadership capacity where really (Principal) just wants to get out of the... what I have here is I have a little bit of, okay, I can manoeuvre so that people do have that voice and are in that position. And I think we are seeing massive changes in people. For example, they will start off with a little...or let me talk to you about what's happening in my room as far as I'm gathering data and doing analysis and the subsequent differentiation how it goes. They would talk about it in a bit of a show and tell why and everyone else would be silent and just...that was very difficult and you know once they finished it would come back to me because no one else would say anything. What we have now is, I walk in there I can say, "Hi everyone, who would like*

to start?” And I really don’t say another word other than at the end I will round it up. And I might give some future directions to it.

I have witnessed a big change in Kate over the last two years, as I have witnessed a big change in myself. I envisioned a kind of leadership in schools that empowered others to be the best they can be. I felt that, as an outsider, I could model that kind of leadership but I didn’t know how it might work for people inside schools. I didn’t anticipate that some leaders might want to keep hold of the power that their leadership roles had endowed on them. I continued:

Me: *So, in terms of looking at my hope for this project I guess was for it to be transformative. I can honestly say that going through this whole thing I am completely transformed; I’m not the same person I was when I first started. So each school I’ve gone into I’ve learned from the experiences that have come before. In terms of your role as a leader in the school, do you think that this project, if you like, has had any impact on your development as a leader, has it contributed to you being able to lead in a different way?*

Kate: *I think it’s totally transformed me...and I know that because I look at people and I think what can I...just the way I am with people is totally different. It’s like we’ve talked about the word facilitator, to make something easy, and I think I’ve really done that. I look at something and I think, instead of thinking, “You’re an idiot, (because you don’t know them) and how could you possibly work in this professional environment, you need to go and find a school where they employ idiots”, that was me, whereas now I think to myself, “What’s stopping you from moving forward and how can I help you to deal with that barrier that’s in the way for you?” And I would be doing that all the time. And sometimes that’s like... I’ve been listening to the word proactive and reactive and sometimes that is a reaction to people but sometimes you almost see it coming as well so you can easily sort of pave the way for somebody. So from that point of view I’ve been totally transformed in how I deal with teachers.*

I think teachers, they also said they work incredibly hard, but I’m thinking more in terms of moving. If I look at teachers as being on a learning continuum exactly the same way as children, so it’s about teachers learning and what things stop them from learning and what things stop them from moving forward. That interests me... previously I would have thought, “I’ll deal with that” or “if you can’t deal with it get out of this job”. So when I say I’ve been transformed, I’ve been transformed to that extent. If you can’t deal with that, get out of this job to now how can I help you...I’m a totally different type of person, totally. And I think that comes from what I’ve learned about leadership in the last two and a half years is that all I need to do to be a great leader is just to be myself, nothing more than that. I don’t need to change anybody, I just need to... and I found it has hugely impacted on how I deal with parents as well how I deal with the principal, how I deal

with the other assistant principal, how I deal with discipline in the school, it's just quite different. So I'm just being myself and not thinking oh! This is my role and this is what I have to do and this is what you people have to do because of my role that I don't have any of that at all. The natural way that you would be with another person is the right way to lead."

We sat quietly for some time and reflected, each in our own way, about what had happened at Beachlands and the influence it had had on us as individuals working to understand the Other. It felt good. It felt empowering. It felt like doing this kind of work was important. I finally broke the silence...

"Thanks, Kate. Thanks for everything."

Part 5

Case Study 2: Forrester Primary School

*Young cat, if you keep your eyes open enough, oh, the stuff you would learn. The
most wonderful stuff!*

- Dr. Seuss

Chapter 8: August, 2008 to August 2010

Getting Started

I had no idea at the time that a visit to my sister's place, in a small community north of Perth, would lead to a rebirth of my research project at Forrester Primary School just as it was breathing its last at Beachlands. Walking on the beach one afternoon I ran into an *old* teaching buddy and she asked me over to her place for dinner that night. Several other people from her school, Forrester Primary, were there including David, the principal, and he and I struck up a conversation about education in general and my work in particular. Later in the year he called me and asked if I would run an Open Space day at the school to evaluate their strategic plan. I later met with the Leadership Team to devise the theme for the day:

THE THEME

*Learning through faith, love and justice;
Forrester Primary School; a community based
on the teachings of Jesus and the love of learning,*

and the invitations were sent out asking staff and parents to attend.

The day of Open Space revealed many passions as well as deep seated concerns that had seemingly lain dormant for some time. Open Space does that - it provides the *space* for people to speak their truth in an environment of respect without judgement, and participants get rapid entry into what it might be like to dialogue more deeply about things that matter to them. Throughout the morning participants ran meetings about issues of concern and in the afternoon they gathered to consider what actions might result from the day. Over there is a group working on a Bike Education proposal, outside in the courtyard a group wrestles with the issue of a differentiated curriculum, and in a quiet corner sits a lone participant creating a plan to run art classes at lunch time, this is her passion and within the supportive framework of Open Space she is free develop her ideas into action. As always with Open Space, people seemingly went away reinvigorated about their work and eager to roll up their sleeves and do something new with it. I went away to put the Book of Proceedings together to send out to the school the following day.

My concern about facilitating an Open Space event is always for what happens afterwards. In opening up possibilities for a different kind of promise for professional

dialogue I too become excited by what could be as I find myself standing in the shoes of those educators who want more. I feel a level of concern to at least take some action towards promoting a new way of harnessing the power of Open Space into the future. Therefore, the following day, I called David and offered to host a debriefing and forward planning session with the Leadership Team so that the synergy created in Open Space could be explored and developed further. He agreed and I returned to the school the following week. It was then that I met the *real* Leadership Team for the first time and realised that this was no ordinary primary school and this was no ordinary principal. As I began to talk through the Open Space event my immediate thoughts were overlaid by a strong feeling that perhaps my research project could be brought back to life here.

I was to discover that the organisational structure at Forrester was already quite different to any that I had previously experienced in schools. In Chapter 9 you'll get to hear David explain his vision for the school but for now you can witness with me the changes he had already begun to make in an attempt to realise that vision. The Leadership Team consisted of six members: David; the two traditional assistant principals, Felicity and Salvatore; Larissa, the Bursar; John, the head of support services, and Sue; a classroom teacher. John and Sue had both, at some earlier time, taken on acting roles as assistant principals when Felicity and Salvatore were away on leave. This was the group assembled in the meeting room when I arrived at Forrester to discuss my impressions of the Open Space day and offer suggestions for where to next.

Along with the Book of Proceedings that showed the work that the participants had done on the day, I also presented a concept map of the main topics covered and their connections to each other, and an AQAL Integral overview (described in detail in Chapter 2) that plotted the subjective, intersubjective and objective/interobjective spectrum of the issues (Wilber, 2007). The integral framework enabled us to see where people's energy was most directed towards-trying to control (the external objective factors) and to see where the likely opportunities for cultural change might come from (the subjective and intersubjective sectors). The discussion was robust but what I noticed right away from David was his ability to listen quietly, to let the conversation just take its course, and, only when it seemed that everyone else had had their say, David gave his interpretation of the situation, not imposing his views

but rather like wondering possibilities aloud, providing a space for others to also wonder.

I went away feeling like I had given them something to go on with but I wanted to be part of what I felt was an emerging opportunity that would be too good to miss. I contacted David and suggested that I could continue my research project in his school as a way of supporting his vision for the school as well as providing me with an opportunity to finish what I had started. I felt that David's vision of leadership aligned with my vision for schools and I increasingly felt that the power to enable reculturing and restructuring lay in the hands of visionary leaders. David agreed and we began a reciprocal partnership that continues to this day.

The journey at Forrester was not without pain, however, it was not so much the pain of resistance as the pain of rebirth as my co-participants and I learnt how to learn ourselves into a different organisational paradigm. There was no particular order as to how the initiative proceeded; it was mostly determined by what my co-participants felt they needed next and many things happened at the same time. I introduced the notion of sociocratic governance to the whole staff, and then worked intensely with the Leadership Team, establishing the purpose for the group and its role in reculturing the school to become a learning organisation. The frustrations they felt were typical of what most curriculum leaders, including myself, report - how to get disengaged teachers engaged in their work, how to have purposeful dialogue that leads to action and how to reinvigorate teachers to become leaders of their own learning. The frustrations I felt were more about trying to balance research and practice. I had access to a vast body of knowledge about why we might choose to do this over that. I had researched the key aspects of successful learning communities so there were certain key attributes that, according to the literature, *had* to be present in the restructuring if this was going to work. But in explaining why something needed to be done in a particular way I had to be careful not to become the autocratic leader. I had to allow for each individual to make their own meaning and sometimes attending to the needs of one person put me in direct conflict with the needs of another.

I attended leadership meetings, led professional dialogue about the changes, facilitated learning days where the Leadership Team became skilled at using hopeful

dialogue. They wanted to know how to deal with difficult, resistant people, how to balance dialogue with doing, and what to do with people who professed to have no interest in the meetings they were trying to run. We established the Learning Hub very early on as I had learnt from my experience at Beachlands that building the capacity of nascent leaders was at the heart of successfully navigating the school towards the future David and his team desired.

Early in 2009 the staff of Forrester went for an overnight Professional Development camp at a beach side retreat house. The Learning Hub felt they had hit a bit of a wall in trying to get other teachers on board and began to acknowledge that they needed different kinds of skills to deal with the issues that emerged when leading others. I suggested running a morning of communication skills, based on aspects of Non Violent Communication (NVC)⁵⁴, with all the staff. I wanted to move the conversation away from *us and them* to a more inclusive dialogue and I believed NVC was a good place to start. My journal entry after that day probably explains it better.

Journal Entry April 8th, 2009

I usually have a crisis of confidence before I facilitate a professional development day but this time it didn't happen. I felt in no doubt that with the help of the Learning Hub we'd identified the just-in-time skills that the participants needed to break the perceived deadlock. We'd talked about the kinds of dilemmas they were coming up against and I felt as though they needed to see this in a different light to turn the conversations around. I said, "You know, from what you're telling me I think the problem is about not having a common language to address the undiscussables in the room. NVC is not going to solve everything but it will give you a place to start having critical conversations." I figured it might be a way to start reframing the culture from a sense of entitlement from some to each person accepting responsibility for what was happening.

⁵⁴ Non Violent Communication assumes that we all share the same, basic human needs, and that each of our actions are a strategy to meet one or more of these needs. NVC begins by assuming that we are all compassionate by nature and that violent strategies—whether verbal or physical—are learned behaviours taught and supported by the prevailing culture.

The day flowed nicely with very positive, engaged energy in the room. People surprised me by raising very personal issues right away. It's something I'd like to go back to and I think David gave me the opening to do that.

Clare came up to me afterwards and told me how hard it had been for her (I'll explain her dilemma below). I understand that and it's a constant worry for me but I have to try and balance what is best for the organisation with what is best for the individual. But, is any of it really in my hands anyway? The best I can do in my role is to provide alternatives to how people see themselves and how they respond to things. I think of how we behave in school when problems arise, as though there's one way of seeing things. I think of being more adaptable and dynamic in being able to handle changing conditions. Clare tells me she has lost her powerbase and doesn't know how to get it back. She said she'd already spoken to John about it but hadn't come to any firm conclusions. I wish I could change things for her. She's the victim of thinking that doesn't fit with the way this should unfold. What is my part in this? Where does my power lie? Am I responsible?

Creating the space to learn

My experience at Beachlands made me realise that we needed to get a Learning Hub up and running as quickly as possible. Perhaps even more so at Forrester as the Leadership Team had developed a strong identity prior to my appearance and I felt that they were in danger of becoming just a different kind of autocratic leadership structure and my conversations with David indicated that he felt the same way. I suggested that people be invited to become part of a group to learn how to lead others and left it to David to take up or not. Again, as with Beachlands, the way the Learning Hub was formed was not in keeping with my understanding of complex systems, never-the-less, I had to live with what happened and in Chapter 9 you'll notice David's reference to his own dilemma in balancing how to respond without a clear road map.

David invited teachers to apply for the Learning Hub and many more than the four who would eventually be chosen, put their names forward. It didn't feel right to me

that others were excluded, including Clare. I wanted the group to be made up of the people who cared most and I didn't see a need to put a number around that. What if everyone turned up! Isn't that what we wish for in schools? It seemed not and the decision to hand pick applicants caused me great angst at Forrester as we continued to restructure and reculture the school. I could see the negative impacts where perhaps others could not and yet I had to continue promoting the Learning Hub as though it was all part of my plan. You see, Clare was the person who had first introduced me to David. Before I came to her school she had enjoyed a powerful position as one of the more mature and long-serving teachers and now, by her own admission, she had lost her place. I had thought that the Learning Hub would be a way for her to find her way back but that was not to be. Recently I facilitated a morning of Professional Development at Forrester, it was held during the holidays but as always I suggested that everyone be invited. Clare was the only person outside the Learning Hub to attend. Again she told me, "I'm an outsider." I felt her pain. I wanted to offer her more.

There were other organisational barriers to my project that I had to live with. I hoped that over time people would come to see that the problems they were encountering were often caused by the hard control they were trying to have over the system. I encouraged them to try and live with uncertainty and not look for perfect solutions. I tried to get them to imagine what might happen if we let the system emerge and find balance in more ecological ways. Right from the start, John became a problem for me. He, more than any of the others, challenged my thinking and wanted to push beyond what I felt the rest of the group were ready for. I tried to explain too much instead of trusting the long-term evolution of the initiative. I pulled gently on John's reins knowing that he was ready to gallop while the others still trotted and we would often both go away frustrated.

The Learning Hub consisted of eight people. Each new member was teamed up with one of the original four members of the Leadership Team (David and Larissa did not become part of the Hub) so that they could lead the general staff towards becoming a learning organisation. The Learning Hub expressed a desire to work with smaller groups and so out of the general staff group four sub-groups were formed, called Learning Pods, and the purpose of the Learning Hub became focussed on how to lead their Pod. My attention was focussed on how to keep the groups connected and how

to keep Larissa and David connected to the groups. What began to emerge was the rift between the original Leadership team members and their now co-facilitators who had applied to become part of the group. Too many things seemed to be getting away on us and I was unsure how much control I should take back. Didn't I have to practice living with emergence as well as expecting the group to? The journal entry below will go some way to describe how I felt at that time.

Journal Entry, late November, 2009

I felt anxious as I pulled into the car park at Forrester. I would have been less anxious if I'd had a clear purpose for the meeting but I was trying to be more hands off, letting the meeting structure find its natural place before I intervened further. I wanted the group to be able to see what was needed with their own eyes. David had asked me to go through the strategic plan again but I wasn't confident that he had remembered that request and noting his car missing from his usual parking spot I realised I'd have to think on my feet again. The meeting was a challenge. After my last meeting with Julie, Travis and Adrienne, which I'll explain further below, I felt as though we'd made a lot of headway but now we were meeting together as the complete Learning Hub I could sense a pall of constraint over the group. I start by asking everyone to check in from where we'd left off and Travis begins by saying how they (the new Learning Hub members) feel out of the communication loop. I notice Adrienne and Travis talking a lot more in the meetings, as though they have finally found their feet (voices).

John is really great at picking up on the language; he said he learns by seeing what is done so I need to be more active and less the talker. He wants to see how the facilitation is done and asks me to facilitate a Pod meeting. He thinks in terms of conditions and proposals. He said several times last night, "If you don't care enough you won't put forward a proposal."

I can see I'm a victim of business-as-usual as well. I talk too much and don't listen enough to pick up on what is being said. Will I ever get it right? I went home last night with my head full of frustrations at my limited ability to do this work well. My head went around and around all night trying to settle on a way to do this. I'm so anxious that they will say, "Well

you're not leading us in the right direction so let's pull back and go it on our own". I'm nervous that I'm not getting them to where they want to be and yet they are learners and need to take this on themselves. Hard...it's so hard.

Julie is fantastic. She is so excited about the project they are doing on the canteen. She wants to see it through to the end and said how everyone has gotten excited about it. She said how good it felt to finally get something happening. At the end of the meeting last night she said how intense the discussion was, it's amazing how focussed they all are.

Travis gets the whole notion of projects and is keen to learn new ways of engaging reluctant people. He likes the idea of working on things he's passionate about and it's great to see him speak up.

Adrienne also found her voice last night; she took my picture of the fluid and emerging projects and ran with it, pointing out to the others where she understands this notion. I'm getting the feel that the young ones are really understanding this – are open to it.

Despite my hesitations I kept being invited back. That's how my role evolved at Forrester; I'd facilitate a session, write my recommendations and leave the field until I was called again. In the meantime the staff at Forrester was struggling with the project each in their own way, the impact often unknown to me until, in some cases, months later when David would send me an email or call me to ask, "What next?" or to elicit feedback for a decision they'd made. Every time I returned to the school I could see a tangible shift in the way the Learning Hub and the Leadership Team engaged together, and in our final meeting something wonderful had transpired, as you will see in Chapter 9.

The meeting I referred to earlier between myself, Adrienne, Julie and Travis, occurred towards the end of 2009. Despite the claims by the original Learning Hub that each had taken on a new member and mentored them as co leaders of the Pods, I sensed that all was not as well as it seemed. The new members were largely silent during meetings and just went along with plans. I suggested to David that I meet with the new Hub members to elicit their thinking without having their mentors

attend and he agreed wholeheartedly. The meeting allowed the group to spill out all the frustrations that they'd kept pent up inside throughout the year. I went away and wrote recommendations for moving forward, met with David to discuss the possibilities and, as 2009 came to an end, my project took time out.

Journal entry, November 30th 2009

Today's meeting was amazing. Adrienne, Travis and Julie need to be heard. How can I do that? There's so much passion there that is consistent with my beliefs about how a learning organisations can evolve with a different kind of leadership that emerges at all levels. In this case the leaders are ready to dance⁵⁵ but they feel constrained by "old" thinking. The problems seem to centre on a lack of clarity about the purpose of the Leadership Team, as opposed to the Learning Hub. The new members of the Learning Hub believe they were sold something that doesn't exist in reality and, to put it in Adrienne's words:

Maybe this isn't what I really wanted. Maybe I'm better off not spending all this time...it was sold to us, like...an opportunity for professional discussion as policy and curriculum leaders.

The others joined in the conversation.

Julie: *Yeah we really haven't done that...help provide links across the whole school, try and not be so insular, being much more open – we probably haven't achieved that purpose.*

Travis: *We have no control over what happens in this group. Decisions are made in the management meeting and maybe...maybe it's just fed through to us but nine times out of ten we're in a dark place.*

Julie: *Yeah, we set the agenda for two weeks time and I think, how is that contributing to our professionalism? Our agenda is set by the Leadership team so why is it that we are...where is my role?*

Adrienne: *Suddenly agendas appear from somewhere and...where's this come from? I think they, as a group, are confused about who they are. Last week they sat there and we sat here and it was like, "Oh, did we say that in the Leadership Meeting or here?" And I thought, you know what, you guys have too many meetings; too many ways to discuss too many points. For me, sorry, that's the grizzle.*

⁵⁵ You Tube video, *Leadership Lessons from the Shirtless Dancing Guy*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=fW8amMCVAJQ

Travis: *To me it's become very territorial. When we spoke about this it was an expanding circle⁵⁶; information filtered out. But now we have this pocket...maybe we're reading it wrong but it seems like it's become this territory. My understanding was that we were to be the Leadership Team but somewhere along the line it fractured.*

I was so excited listening to the group talk but my mind was racing, trying to think of the best way to get through this dilemma. I felt that we were at a critical point in the project where these three emerging leaders would be lost if we didn't act carefully. I made a promise to the group to discuss the issues with David but they had to make a promise back to me. I referred the group to Travis' statement that, "We have no control over what happens in this group" and reminded them that they did have the power to speak about what was true for them. I invited them to consider their responsibility to make the Learning Hub work and that they could use the strategies learnt in the NVC workshop to speak hopefully about what they wanted from it. They promised to act bravely in raising their concerns in the next Learning Hub meeting. In Chapter 9 you'll witness the outcome of their promise as, mid way through 2010, I met with the Leadership Team and Learning Hub to dialogue about the project and its impact on the school.

Moving on

I continued to work with the Learning Hub as the project evolved and they took increasing command of making the decisions for themselves. Rather than me suggesting what should go next, they began to call me to run workshops in the areas that they identified were ripe to grow the organisation. Earlier in 2010 I'd run a workshop to help them develop their strategic plan and they decided they wanted to rerun it for all the staff and parents. I suggested a process to them and they planned and co facilitated two days of learning. Only afterwards did I get to hear about what happened (in Chapter 9 you'll get to hear about it too). This was what I'd hoped for; that my role in the school would become increasingly less necessary as the people inside the organisation trusted that they already had the wisdom needed to restructure and reculture their organisation. Today my links with Forrester Primary School are as they should be, one of many valuable connections in the network of people who care about what happens at that school. When we work together - the staff, parents,

⁵⁶ Reference to Expanding Circles, the name of my private consultancy

community members, researchers, and students - we have the capability to reculture and restructure the school into a sustainable, catalytic learning organisation.

Chapter 9: An Auto-ethnographic Study of a Principal and His Co leaders

"There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things."

— Niccolo Machiavelli *The Prince* (1532)

David's Story

David and I don't go back. Well, at least he showed no signs of recognition when we re-met socially, years later, through a mutual colleague. He'd once been my lecturer for a short course at university. Clearly, I hadn't made an impression. Now, David seemed to think I had something worth saying as he followed up on that initial conversation, over a few wines that led to me facilitating an Open Space event at Forrester.

I had learnt much about leading change in the short time I'd been at Beachlands, so my entry into Forrester was cautiously hopeful, despite the fact that, this time, I came more as an invited guest. I still needed to mind my manners and be polite and respectful. I needed to tread cautiously and look out for the invisible line that I might, inadvertently, step over.

David was a listener, and right from the start that posed problems for me. I had no idea what he was thinking. He'd listen, and listen and listen and I would try to read the play. I'd try to communicate more intently. I'd explain my reasoning and ask for responses from the group. Everyone else spoke but David. Then, just when I felt myself drifting onto quicksand, self-questioning my approach, David would chime in with a comment that hit the nail right on the head. He'd refocus the group and challenge them to hold on tight and, in doing so, he gave me implicit permission to keep on going. Never-the-less, I'd learnt to communicate better so I made sure I followed up every meeting with an email debrief and some suggestions for how we might respond to conditions as they emerged. I left it up to David to decide when and how that might happen even though I sometimes felt a sense of disquiet that maybe I wasn't meeting the needs of the whole group. I kept quiet. I knew that, at

the end of the day, my role in schools would always be tenuous and that David was the person who knew his people best and was in a better position than I to make the call.

As a leader, David commanded great respect from his followers. They all wanted to be in his camp. They liked him and they liked his company so the motivation to follow him was considerable right from the outset. When we set up the Learning Hub, more people than we could handle wanted to be part of it. In the end, David chose four members. I was nervous about this decision because it was not in keeping with the open ended design of the new structure but, other than suggesting that the group remain fluid, there was little I could do. Later, in the focus group conversation, David expressed his own concern and suggested a need to open the group up. Over the two years that the Learning Hub had been together, one member had left and a new member had been invited in. Many more were still looking over the fence wanting to play.

But what I learned from David, over the years, was patience. If there is one leadership trait that David displayed above all others it was patience, and from that patience came permission for the group to struggle and question and find their own feet. From that patience came trust that the group would find the will to move in the direction that David was guiding them towards. And that was the other thing. There was no doubting that despite his patience, David had a very clear picture of where he wanted the organisation to go. He never faltered, he set a steady course and, hand on the tiller, guided Forrester towards a different kind of future.

David is ready to tell his story now. Let's sit back and listen.

If I look back to where I first recognised that I wanted to embrace the kind of change Paula was suggesting, I think, initially, it was hearing about Open Space. I was doing a principal review at another school and every staff member talked about it. I'm not sure what impact it had on the principal but it really struck me that it had had such an impact on the staff and it made me want to find out more about it. I liked the idea of everyone leading and it brought back lots of ideas I'd seen over the years. Years ago,

at a principal's conference, they showed some sort of video about a fish shop, I think it was in Canada, Anyway, it was going broke and they got everyone from behind the counter and into the public and they turned it around. It's actually become a tourist attraction⁵⁷ where they throw the fish and interact with the public. It struck me at the time that it was a fascinating way to work. To give the people working in the shop the opportunity to be part of it; to get out there and do it and that would also *give* them the ability to do it too. So I think, for me, a whole lot of things that I'd been playing with over the years came together with this initiative and it's allowed me to become more like the leader I always wanted to become.

Since we started restructuring and reculturing the school, using Paula's initiative, there have been a lot of changes; a lot of improvements. The whole area of decision making has been opened up. There are many more opportunities for people to participate and that has led to increased accountability because if you're part of the decision then you take responsibility for it. It made me think that in some meetings now it might look, from the outside, like a free-for-all but it actually requires a good structure under it. Gradually people are seeing the need for those structures and how they bring people in without strangling the whole process. The wider leadership group has improved tremendously over the last two years with individuals really flourishing in their thinking and creativity. We've come a long way.

Of course there have been frustrations along the way; mainly waiting for everybody to get to the same spot. I'd have people chewing in my ear because they were kind of already there and others weren't. It was just like a bubbling pot and I knew that at any time I could just step up to them and say, "Just do it!" But I knew that wasn't the right thing to do but I guess that was the annoying bit, or the frustrating bit, kind of having to ride it out because if I see something I tend to get into, maybe too quickly sometimes, so it's good to have the handbrake on sometimes as well.

⁵⁷ Pike Street Fish Market, Seattle.

It's almost like dealing with autism though, where if you first provide a structure then you can let it go. I think the change was too much for some people so while I know we have to keep the groups fluid and open I agree with needing to keep the group tight as well; it's a fine balance. With the passion-action-vision (PAV) idea, and that came out of a Hub meeting, but they immediately put a number around it and immediately said everyone has to be part of it. I thought, "Uh, Okay!" I could see they were moving in the right direction and I could see why they might do that initially but what I would really like to see is, and I've flagged it a few times and maybe next year we'll get closer to it...like someone might say, "Let's have a PAV on how we use the hall." Those people who are passionate rock up on the day and the others go home or whatever so I see the PAVs as being about ... I've tried that, in the past, with staff meetings that weren't compulsory, but I even had resistance to that idea. I thought if you want to be there you'll be there and if you don't you'll take the decisions that were made. The meeting worked alright but there was still this undercurrent. I believe if you really want to get into something you'll do it and if you never sit on a PAV in your life that's your problem, not my problem. When you look at it though we haven't really had a dropout rate; people aren't running away from this.

Working on the strategic plan with the whole staff and the community was a turning point in the process. The energy that was generated was amazing and people were surprised that they could actually be part of it. For the whole 2 days we worked together there wasn't anyone looking out the window or whatever. I think the staff members and community members who had the chance to see it and work on it really connected to it and see it very much as a dynamic, moving feast, which is a good thing. I was saying to Sue the other day, I dare not change it, she's the custodian, we almost need to have a working area for innovations that haven't made it into the main flow yet. I think that would be great.

The only problem I have with it, and I would say it's a technical problem, I guess, is how we share it with the wider community without having to take

everyone through the staff room. I mean it's perfectly placed where it is but how to put it on our website, for example without losing the actual dynamic quality of it will be an interesting challenge for someone like a designer. It needs to be 3-dimensional to capture the fact that it's in motion, like balls spinning or something. The problem is that on paper it loses its dynamism so I don't know how we're going to do that or put it out there. We might just have to put out an open invitation for anyone to come through the staff room and we can show it to them until we find a better way to do it.

One of the things that Paula encouraged us to do, when she was coaching us through the strategic planning session for the first time, was to come up with our own language to describe our vision of where we were going. I recently visited Sweden, on sabbatical, and one of the things that I picked up from a consultant from Finland was that schools should find their own niche. It has to come from inside the school, not someone telling them what they're good at and I think this model actually allows you to do that. We've got so many things going on but maybe it's the governance model that's our niche that allows the other things to happen and allows that number of things to happen at the same time. For years I've been waving Michael Fullan's book about what's worth fighting for, that series has been absolutely fantastic but finding something to hook the ideas to has been very hard in the traditional structure but this has had the flexibility of being able to change the structure, as well as the culture, along the way.

I think it's important to consider the connection between research and what is actually happening in schools. We have four teachers in the Learning Hub alone studying at post graduate level. John was doing an assignment the other day about research and schools and it made me realise just how much research there is being done in our school and how much we're assisting it and how it's helping turn people's thinking around. I think from both ends, academic and practical, people are able to make connections to things and it gives them the language to speak about what they tacitly know but perhaps didn't have the words to describe it before. I think you can see real growth in this area from some staff.

Paula asked me what I thought about letting the rest of the staff in on the struggle that we've been through. I think it was from something John mentioned when we had the focussed conversation. I hadn't really thought about it but I guess it could actually be an expectation that if we're evaluating everything that moves at the micro level, I don't think it will be long before people will be asking well why aren't you evaluating what's happening at the macro so there probably is a need to do that.

As far as looking at the sustainability of this initiative, I certainly think engaging the community is the way to go. We have key community people already on board so it's a matter of bringing them along and keeping them in the loop. The guys doing their masters have a role to play in getting the message out there to the wider community; they're the ones to trigger it. I still think we need to go out wider and have the (Education Office) ask what's going on rather than trying to work through their structure.

I think the view of leadership here is that it is ok to mess up, we're in this together and we're working on how to do it better. That's the key. The view of leadership overall is that you don't make mistakes, you get things right which is the widely held view across the board. It's comforting to know you can let that go. It's almost made the leadership in the school like that octopus in Germany during the soccer World Cup, with all the tentacles. I think there are many more arms to leadership now. People exerting leadership, if that's the word, without being overt about it. I think we've got a multi-faceted approach to leadership now. The bit I have to get better at is like being the mushy part of the octopus where the tentacles all feel they can come back without me controlling them. Even those who want to be controlled, they're hooked on for sure but they're still floating around there; it's very much like that; multi-faceted.

Come to think of it, I think what it's really done for me, as the traditional leader, is it's given me more time to get involved in people type stuff rather than desk type stuff. We've become better at trying to determine where we want to go and working out how we're going to get there as

more of a group think...well group think isn't the right term because people don't think the same and that's one of the beauties of the people here. I never go into a leadership meeting being able to predict what's going to come out of it. It's more about everybody putting their ideas in and it certainly is leading us into the future but with a lot more planning coming behind it; not restrictive planning but more open thinking from the group.

If I was going to hand on some advice for anyone taking up this kind of school improvement I'd have to say that having the right critical friend, like Paula, working with the staff, individually with people, and with me, is one of the key components. I've learnt that over the years that you need the support of that external person to help you see where you're going. I think the work Paula has done with us has enabled us to keep moving in the desired direction and I think that's something you can't do without.

David looked into the distance as if contemplating the next step that needed to be taken. He laughed; "So I think there's another 10 years working this, Paula!" And we went off to end as we began, with great dialogue and a glass of fine wine.

A Focussed Conversation: The Leadership Team and Learning Hub at Forrester Primary School

The following conversation, with nine participants of the combined Leadership Team and Learning Hub at Forrester Primary School, took place one afternoon in early August, 2010. I'd arranged to return to Forrester to find out what had happened over the time since I had last spoken to the whole group and I was a little anxious about what I might hear. You'll find out why a little later but for now watch as we gather around the board room table; the high-spirited banter and laughter you can hear is a signature of this group, they're always highly charged. If I didn't *know* them as well as I do I could be forgiven for thinking that this unruly group are not going to be tamed today and I might as well forget my need to get their impressions down. But, as the last of the group take their seats, they quieten and looked towards me and we begin. This group never ceases to amaze me with their ability to be passionate about everything and when it comes to dialoguing deeply about their work, they take the

award every time. No jingling keys in this group. More likely they have to be *told* to go home. They are what I believe teachers are *really* capable of when the conditions are right.

The Players:

David: Principal and member of the Leadership Team

Felicity: Assistant Principal and member of the Leadership Team and Learning Hub

Salvatore: Assistant Principal and member of the Leadership Team and Learning Hub (absent)

Larissa: Bursar and member of the Leadership Team

John: Coordinator of Special programs and member of the Leadership Team and Learning Hub

Sue: Classroom teacher, and member of the Leadership Team and Learning Hub

Travis, Julie, Scott and Adrienne are all classroom teachers and are members of the Learning Hub and, along with John, Felicity, Salvatore and Sue, are co facilitators of the Pods.

In the past John and Sue had been in acting roles as Assistant Principals when the incumbents were on leave.

I began the conversation by asking:

“Has your work changed over the time... the last two years since the structure of the school has changed; and by the structure I mean when you change from a traditional leadership team to having a Learning Hub and Pods and having a different format for organizing changed, so has your work changed over time?”

And from there, with guidance from Habermas’ ideal speech situation (explored further in Chapter 8) as described by Grundy (1987), I let the group dialogue freely with only the occasional input from me to clarify points or move the discussion on.

John: *Yes. We are more action driven, it seems like every meeting we have we go away with a clear understanding of what we have to do and what time frame it has to be completed, that is, in the Leadership Team. What*

was it like before? Well, lots of discussion, no one taking leadership of the actions and not necessarily action coming out as a result.

Travis: *They've become more, in regards to staff, meetings and Pods and things, it's changed. They have become more, what's the word, little. Professionally, sort of like efficient development within our own school as opposed to just talking about certain things happening maybe in the playground or structurally within the school, it has become a lot more about, like maths, like our national curriculum, analyzing data it has become about PD and learning things not just discussing things, but also learning things and taking that way.*

Julie: *You know, going on from what Travis said, the structure of meetings in terms of the content it is not all just information giving. A lot of the old staff meetings were just about just sending out information, to the masses, you know, it was just giving out information so, I suppose, for us, its more productive use of our day book, it's more about, what Travis said the professional development side of looking at curriculum looking at really specific needs of the school, and I suppose that is using the time wisely rather than just handing out information and waiting for those PD days for the curriculum side of things so it's a lot better, the time management I suppose is a lot better in what is discussed.*

Felicity: *I believe there is more genuine shared leadership, it was not a heavy talk down model in the past, but definitely more that direction whereas now it's a much more collaborative approach with a larger leadership group and I believe that more opinions and discussions lead to better decision making and I think that has then transferred into a more engaged staff. We had difficulties when we used to have our groups that were called PLCs (professional learning communities) and are now called Pods. The difficulty was trying to get people engaged, but there is a stronger sense of participation within those Pods now and some of the topics are perhaps more meaningful to people and engage them more, but nothing generally across the school people are more engaged.*

David: *I agree with Felicity, and I think there's even more initiative by the staff. We still have some absenteeism, but it has greatly diminished and more people are more into what's happening and people are genuinely part of it.*

Larissa: *I think too also, I agree with Felicity and David. But also I think there is less of the David card thrown, like I think people are taking more responsibility for actions and it's engaging the whole staff whereas, before it was more that is a David decision, which always comes from top down and David will always be responsible, but I think it is just more of a shared leadership now I think people are prepared to take on the owner ship of the model and be prepared to take that responsibility and accountability for it because it's a larger group.*

John: *Also one of the things that I like about the Pods and the Hub is that you are working in groups that are smaller they are not so large and that is not a whole staff meeting or we are not engaging 60 plus people to*

help us make a decision. It is actually each particular area whether it's the Hub, the Pod, the PAV (see explanation below), wherever it is they all have a specific role to play and they are all focused on what that role is and then information is disseminated across all those areas as it is quite a process that enables everyone to have participation, but it is not so big and cumbersome that we lose a lot of the staff like where people aren't going to be engaged because there are too many people studying you know, saying things over the top of other people. Making sure everyone gets that opportunity, which I really like too.

Adrienne: *I think it's been great that we have actually evolved and where things maybe happen, we've seen that. It hasn't gone the way that we thought it would, but we reflected and made it work for us. And, reform in a way that does bring people back and enthuse people again, and get that up and have something running, and lot of the shared leadership there's a lot more. Lot more people taking ownership with different...*

I was so excited about what I was hearing. I really didn't know what to expect when I asked to have this conversation so I had taken a chance that they wouldn't lynch me. I hated to break into the conversation but I needed to know what PAV stood for. It was an acronym I hadn't heard before but I got the feeling that it may have grown from a seed that I had planted some time ago. Adrienne answered:

Adrienne: *The PAV is our new group which you used...the passion-action-vision group. Initially you talked about like working parties and, after running through the thoughts, we did realize that that's the direction that we wanted to head in, so with the, high interest groups, where people basically put forward ideas that they would like to work towards making a difference in...so we've got eight of them, six, up and running, which we have aligned ourselves to as the Hub. We've aligned ourselves with each of those groups, and then...at the moment we're in beginning stages. We've only had two PAV meetings, for the proposals, and just working at their overall act on the way where they think, they would like to be heading, like I've got a gifted and talented, and it's promoting the arts in the school, so there's a whole a range of, of high interest.*

Paula: *At this point in time I want to cheer!*

Oh wow! Can you believe it! "At last!" I thought to myself. You see, one of the things that has always puzzled me in schools is the way we keep everyone together as learners. We all have to be doing the same thing at the same rate. Oh, yes! We know all about differentiating the curriculum for students. We know all about activating students' prior knowledge and taking them from what they know to what they want/need to know. But when it comes to adult learning, well, we ask everyone to line up to be anointed together; over and over again if necessary, until we all reach the same point...together. It never happens, of course, but we keep doing it anyway.

My hope for the organisational reculturing and restructuring that I proposed was that groups would organise around an idea that fired them up; that they would encourage others to join them; that they would passionately work towards taking action and that it would improve the organisation in the desired direction. I envisioned many of these groups popping up throughout the school, even inviting external stakeholders to be part of the innovations - or even starting their own! Now, here was Adrienne describing how Forrester was moving towards that vision with their PAVs. Can you see why I wanted to cheer?

David added a point about the new PAVs having an impact on staff wellness. Ahhh, I wanted to hear more but I let it go for the time being because Sue, who had been quiet until now, joined the conversation. (I had the opportunity to follow up with David in a later interview).

Sue: *I think one of the things I've really noticed is, is the way that people, have come along to Pods and being so willing to share, you know, one of the, great improvements since this started is the way that, people are sharing, and taking on board...what the people are doing too...and thinking I'll have go at that or...yeah...very willing.*

David: *One of the changes with the Pods and PAVS is that we spend the first of our Pod time the first 20 minutes are spent on Pod business and then, from there, people dissipate to whatever PAV they're involved in so there's much more fluidity of thought the movement of people's interests rather than stay within the last structure as we were before, I still think we got a little flexibility-ways to go.*

John: *The other thing I'd like to say is that I'm really glad that I was working with this group of people because when we first started down this road, I can't actually remember exactly when but talking about it, it seems like an eon ago, and you talked about it being chaos before the calm, and I personally want to kill you about 25 times along the journey, because we're in chaos. It was just so, frustrating there, I just could not believe, because we're all going along that journey, possibly all in the same direction, I believe, but all at different phases with different understandings and it's taken a great deal of energy and passion from all people concerned to make this actually work and without people legitimately, and heart-felt taking this on board and being willing to go through, a real process of change, a painful process at times. It's not looking lovely and lovey-dovey and kumbaya - that kind of stuff. It's been tough, but I think it's a credit to the team that we've worked with that...we've, got to where we are today.*

Paula: *Actually you've raised many interesting points. One of the, desires I guess I had through this research project was that if people took on this change, it would be transformative. You would not be the same person that you started out being. I'm kind of hearing a little of that here. There*

seems to be a real sense of the positive here at the moment and it hasn't always been like that, so John's kind of indicated how it affected him, and I knew that. And your... how it's felt for you has also affected me so he is being ...a lot of me going about thinking, "Oh my goodness what am I doing to these people? But having that real belief that something great would come out of it if we persevered..., so would you like to talk about how hard it has been for you what it has been like and has it been transformative? Yes Julie?

Julie: *Yeah. Definitely, I mean, I was just thinking as John was speaking, you know, it would be really interesting to do the DISC⁵⁸ analysis now and compare it to where we were because I remember the very first time we did it, we were discussing it. I think David and John were in leadership sort of thing and I think we have all been so much more empowered and stepped up to that challenge that I believe if we do it again...I think that that analysis would be a totally different picture. It was such a new experience for us and even though we're up for the challenge, it's really, you know, when was the last? Was that two years, two years now? It's just like this entire change, I mean, it's been up and down, but it's been, you know, you still look back at it and go, "Okay, I can see, it's like that, what you're saying the calm before the storm." It's like that. All of the tasks, but it would be really interesting to say how that analysis would differ from what it was to what it is now because I just think, we just have such a different place officially as well as, as a group. It's been, it's probably been a really good year, I would have to say, you know, of really, come on board and really on the same page and really know where we want to go and I suppose we've been empowered to be able to do that. So yeah, I think we sort of made, made it through, so it's, it's a good process.*

John: *And more so, I was interested that a particular staff member who maybe doesn't usually engage and does have difficulty, taking the next step forward has actually done that of recent times...has come along and helped me in one of the areas that I'm working in, of their own volition, which I think is an enormous change and so even with people that may not have necessarily or still aren't quite there, you can actually see some changes starting to take place. They're coming on board a little bit more because they really have no choice any longer because it becomes more obvious if you didn't.*

Paula: *So, it's the system that actually sanctions rather an individual person? Have you gone from that period, where it seems like, "What are we going to do with resistant people?" to having that turning point where most people are actually comfortable?*

Felicity: *I think one of the things with that, you think ... the Hub leaders, are out there in the...what they call this, co-acts and so they...they truly experience what the other teachers, and are mindful of what the teacher assistants do, which is often that judgment that people who sit in offices didn't really know, you know, what the teachers have to put up with and I think that's not unjust treatment either, but I think having the Hub members*

⁵⁸ Extended DISC Personal Analysis is a self-assessment that identifies the strengths and development areas of an individual.

working side by side with leadership we can ensure the transfer of information where they can truly say you know, what it's like in the classroom, how its impacting on them, you know, this is just too hard for us and we understand where they're coming from and hopefully the transfer of information from leadership down so there is genuine shared leadership.

And then I think, as somebody mentioned earlier, the smaller Pod groups, I think at first we have a large component of teacher assistants in our school because we have a lot of special needs students and, I guess it's fair to say in the past most of them tended to sit back and perhaps didn't feel that their opinion was valued and through the process of, opening rounds, where everybody, says something and a closing round where everybody says something, you know, that gently engaged everybody within the group and then because of that smaller discussion and I believe good facilitation by the, Hub and leaders, they felt comfortable enough to speak up and know that their opinions were valued and so I believe that's an area where we have much more input from all staff members and often they've got, very wise words to say because they, you

John: *I felt, along the path, a lot of what we were doing was initially very fabricated, by people structuring it to make it work. And trying to make it work, in fact, went against the process. There were times when, from a personal perspective...I think it's right now, but that's what I wanted, that's what I saw right from the very beginning, was the whole idea that the Pods were a working entity, that were working on improving the school in whatever area people were passionate about, but what we tended to do was not want to let go of the way we worked in the past so we were pushing everything into the Pods and we were overloaded with information and had very little, if any, time to act*

Whenever we worked on a particular area, it seemed to be that we were trying to engage people that really didn't want to be there; didn't have the passion to deal with that issue or didn't have the expertise to participate in it. So, it's all like people forcing it down people and it took a long, long time for us to sort of wake up and smell the roses and go, well if you want things to happen and we want it to work it will. It's being strong enough to let feelings go and people just go for it and I was so relieved when that happened because that was probably one of my biggest frustrations over the last 18 months, was that it seemed to be you would hear all this negativity from people that we never do anything, nothing ever gets done. To now, we've got these what appears to big dynamic groups. There's still going to be issues without a doubt. We're still working there, even within the PAVS we've got issues about keeping people positive, keeping them engaged in understanding the processes so we've still got work to do, but my goodness, we work... like it's so much better.

Adrienne: *I think as part of the struggle, but the other good thing to come from it, was I certainly felt last year that there was dead time maybe, that the meetings were not doing anything in... it was literally agenda setting and just meeting, and meeting, and meeting, and I think when we did kind of branch out a bit, and there was...we broke up into the, when you met with the*

co facilitators and I guess the seed was a kind of planted then, and since then I think one apparent thing is that, as co-facilitators we found our voice really. This is what we want and we may have forced it down your throats. But I think that that, you know, the outcome of that is that we've got PAVS up and running and we've got enthusiasm from staff and I'm feeling a lot more enthusiastic about each meeting now this is actually a PAV School and we are getting somewhere and we've got direction so...

I heard many things while Adrienne was speaking that made me want to squeal with excitement. When Adrienne said, "We're a PAV School!" she was claiming ownership for creating something uniquely Forrester's. She had been part of writing the narrative of passion-action-vision; she knows the story and can tell it proudly. Schools often take on change initiatives that have labels like PATH Schools, or THRASS Schools, or IDEAS schools but as off-the-shelf labels they lack the power that is embedded in Adrienne's proclamation. Adrienne has positioned herself as a central character in the story of how Forrester became a PAV school. Her struggle is embedded in the plot and she can relate to the story at a deeply personal level. Will PAVs go the way of many initiatives introduced into schools; only living as long as the most passionate advocate? I'd like to think PAVs have been created out of a different kind of motivation and Adrienne will be just one custodian at Forrester who sees that they continue to grow and evolve.

Adrienne's comment about my meeting with the co facilitators was one of the reasons that I was anxious about coming back to this meeting. I felt that I may have promised something that I couldn't deliver on and now what I heard was that it sowed a seed that they took ownership of. They didn't need me to do anything other than what I had done, and that made the kind of work I did feel right. It happened like this...

Towards the end of 2009, I met, by request, with the four co facilitators of the Learning Pods; Travis, Julie, Adrienne and Sally (who withdrew as a co facilitator shortly after the meeting and was replaced by Scott). The group expressed frustration at how events were unfolding at Forrester. They felt that the promise that was made to them about opportunities for leadership were being unnecessarily stifled and they wanted action to improve their conditions. I have described this meeting further in Chapter 4.

Julie breaks into my thoughts and continues.

Julie: *At the beginning it was almost like chasing at times, you know, we have Hub meetings then set the agenda for the Pod meeting and then, “What are we going to do next week?” and then it was like Jen said, you know, it was this always agenda setting and I was, “Whoa! What are we doing?” You know, seriously, is this the best use of our time and it just sort of felt like, you know, we were just constantly chasing ourselves and trying to keep up with them. “Oh, What if this happens? Oh, Problems arise, oh, my gosh what are we going to do?” And, you know, we just, I didn’t know, I just didn’t feel productive, but I think this year more than anything, I think, like Adrienne was saying. I think we’ve been empowered to be able to go, “Look, this is the direction that we want to go in and this is what we anticipate will happen.” At some point, I thought, well, maybe I need to withdrawn from the Hub, you know, this might not be meeting the needs of what I want to do, but then this change happened.*

I’ve identified the change to finding my voice, not that I didn’t have a voice because that’s the wrong thing to say. I have always, always had a voice, but I suppose the confidence to be able to voice an opinion and as far as co-facilitators, we really, we started communicating more and I think that was a huge change, not just in Hub meetings, but as part, “Oh What do you think of this?” Or just that constructive discussion so we were communicating more and I think we then realized that we were on the same page of what we want, we envisioned things being taken ok, we were able to just sort of come together as a group and think, well, this is what we want. This is what we think should happen and work out what’s the best way that we can take it forward and I supposed that was the day when we changed.

Paula: *So in listening to what you’re saying I can kind of feel that this time last year, we could not have this kind of conversation.*

John: *No way!*

Paula: *So, to me, it sounds like there’s a level of trust that’s felt it in the group would you...?*

Adrienne: *It changed from that day when we all sat down and went, this is what we envisioned happening and then from that minute, the leadership team understood where were coming from. We understood where they were coming from. Again we’re all on the same page. Why didn’t this happen over a year ago!*

Travis: *I think part of the struggle was that when we initially signed on... what we had done for some... a lot of the first year, which was last year, was not necessarily what we thought it was going to be. It was a lot of agenda setting and, which we thought, from talking to each other; it was more about the curriculum and policies side. I was thinking that kind of stuff so I think for me there was frustration that we weren’t really doing a lot. There was a little bit of it here and there. We started the national curriculum and things like that, but it wasn’t really any sort of meaty stuff that was really interesting and I think the turning point was, for me, when we met with you and we discussed*

what we would like out of this and there were lots of questions and ideas and lots of different things came up. It wasn't that all stuff that worked out, but I think that was the turning point when we decided that was the direction and there seemed to be a bit more clarity I think from everybody involved.

Paula: *It was December, last year.*

Travis: *Yeah and I think after a year we have had enough time just to think, "Okay what have we have done actually in this group that we wanted to do for ourselves and the group in school?" And I think then we sort of thought if this is going to continue, I didn't know if this is really right for us, all, or right for me and so I think that was the turning point, for me anyway, it was when the Hub met and we discussed what did we see ourselves doing. I remember getting out that piece of paper that said the role of the management, leadership, the Hub, the Pods, and I remember looking at that all the time and thinking, "Hang on that should be out there so why are we talking about it now, you know, constantly, we're going after that!" But we haven't really had that this year? It's like we all know now. The Hub's role has been defined I think much more clearly now.*

Paula: *Okay. Given that it's a process that actually makes sustainable, the actual struggle the going through the hard bit the finding what it's like individually for each of you, knowing that according to my research that if you don't go through the struggle, you don't transform so given that, can you imagine a school going through this process, without some kind of guidance like my role?*

Larissa: *No Paula, I don't think so. I believe that we had to go through the process. We had to go through the blood, sweat, and tears and tantrums. We had to go through the building up of the trust. And it was so tense, but I think, as leadership, we went through the same for a very long time. And then all of a sudden, we clicked, we, we had that trust, within our leadership training with you and also likewise with the Hub. I think the process they had to go through, the actual process of...while the pace is slow it was evolving and you could see it, that they had to come to the realization themselves to where they would...and that I think happened, so I think we've all learnt and I think trust is a big thing, like it's huge.*

Sue: *And I think the other thing is communication too, getting us all on the same page in the same kind of thinking and that communication... it does flow a lot better and it is more, more fluid.*

Adrienne: *I think you had initially said it would take a year to form then up to five years, right?*

Paula: *(smiling) At least 3 for it to become embedded...*

Adrienne: *You did give us some more time frames but, when you kind of backed off, you fell into the background, we were left to our own devices, and looking back now...it was mess and we've got to a point, with frustration and we were up to tantrums and I think... so it clicked in when someone said, "But Paula said the wheels would fall off and we'd get to this point!" And for*

me, it felt better thinking about we were meant to end up in a mess. So how do we get it going, how do we fix it? And I think we did bring you back and you got us back on track again. But, like you say, if you were to... like the school ran this process through themselves and have no one to draw them back on track...no...

Paula: *When I think of the role that I'm trying to establish I guess, that is a significant role that somebody could actually play in education that perhaps hasn't been created yet. That person who works in the background and is in the wings when you just can't see the way forward, that to me, there is a, you know, the possibility of the different kind of role here.*

John: *Can I just say something too. I've had some frustration for me at times...you changed your tack so many times that I'm going...I've got this in my head. I understand where it was, and (this isn't a negative by the way, because it actually makes you think) but the reality was you went away then came back the next time, you'd say something slightly different. You changed, you moved things around a little bit and I'd I go, "Gee, I just got that in my head and I just thought I got it." And you change it at times. You were actually positive and I actually enjoy that because (not at a time but on reflection) I think that you diverted me from other things that annoyed me probably more....*

Paula: *For me it was really quite interesting because, John, you would have picked up on my big picture quicker than anyone. The frustration for both you and I was that I could see other people weren't ready. So that's when I would go away and rethink and bring something...possibly back track a little bit. So while I could understand very clearly, where you were ready to go, you were my challenge because you were galloping ahead and I was trying to hold back a little bit to try to get things to sort of fall into place. And I think it's been interesting listening to what you've been saying that, you've remembered things that I said, but not until later... it hasn't fallen into place. So, I think one of the, the things that obviously where I took the view that you might have the question, but you're not really ready to live the answer here. And I think this kind of process really brings that alive that you can hear all the words, but you're not ready to actually put it into practice. And I think that's what's different from normal professional development that you actually had to struggle through this. You had to find your way of doing it, which you have.*

John: *I'm just curious to... in terms of the Management Team, Leadership Team, and the Hub have been on this journey to different levels, but I think we're all in the same place now. I still feel there's a lot of work to be done in making sure other staff are aware of the struggles - it will be great once this is all done, if it's opened up to other people to have a read because I'm curious as to what people on the outside think; teacher assistant or the teacher that may not have got as actively engaged. Do they think we were just sitting here having a wonderful time playing with their minds, or do they actually think that there was process we were going through and to appreciate that in that process there was lots of evolution, lots of change, lots of us we have to make it so human.*

Paula: *Well, you people here you have the power to tell that story.*

John: *Okay. The reality for me is that it's, we actually have to change a lot of things you're saying and make it, and that's a huge challenge and I'd like all staff to be aware, so much like this needs to be taken now one step further and our journey needs to be explained at this level to show people that we are, you know, we are changed, that it does take a lot of energy and time and that it's not something that just happens; clicks in like that.*

Travis: *Just going on from there. I think that's a good point about other staff members who are not in this group initially with the change, because we had sort of been briefed for it, I guess in a way, by you Paula, they weren't really expecting it. They didn't know how to react to it and I think, as co facilitators (we're just saying this for the four of us) heard a lot more feedback about those changes than perhaps the Leadership Team would have, because we sit next to them at lunch time, or on playground duty or whatever. And I think we...that was a struggle for me hearing that because there was a lot of negative stuff happening, talking about, why we changed these things is stupid. It seems like a waste of time. That kind of stuff and it was interesting for me to have to be professional from this group, because also I was thinking along the same thing. "What is this about?" You know? So I had to try and be professional in that sense in still trying to encourage it and, and you just about managing myself from the point of view of this group and also as just a regular staff of, you know, a teacher outside of the Hub. We heard a lot more people are more likely to bitch for want of, you know, use of another word, to one of the teachers, as opposed to one of the leadership people.*

David: *Going back to your role in it, Paula, I think, I actually didn't find any of it hard...I enjoying watching it, and sometimes it annoyed me, but, I just figured it was something that had to happen and what I think though was critical to have an external facilitator to read the crowd basically and to manage that through and I've noticed...I hope, you would continue with the school, but I've noticed that since you've pulled back a bit, the crew, especially, I guess, the co-facilitators, but even within the Hub, have started to manage the things much more... that they see who's out there. I think, in the beginning, though we thought we were all the same, but, we were pretty diverse in our thinking and our approach and to the whole project. And I think it is going to take five years before the staff, as a whole, is equally as comfortable with it. And I think there's a lot of work to be done in moving forward. It's just interesting watching how much responsibility, this particular group takes in dealing with those problems or issues or concerns or looks for advice from the external facilitator, but that's where I think the role is critical the whole way through in maintaining some relationship and would determine the over-all success over the five, six, seven, ten year period.*

Travis: *I agree. Whenever there were issues that would come up it was always refreshing to have a point of view that was not tainted by being in leadership, or being a classroom teacher, or being in the Pod or whoever. It was just purely looking in and asking what do I see is happening here. I found that really something.*

Felicity: *I have to agree. There were times, of course, this is the way that you created turmoil, Paula, and sometimes John and I tended to have those conversations where we're suddenly, totally confused over where we stood, but I think, out of all of that so much good has come and you can look back and you can see, you know, why that was happening, but at that time, not necessarily.*

Paula: *I think the difficulty is that when you are trying to do something to implement change that's very different; that's not business as usual, that I'm sitting in a position having this whole research base behind me that I can't give you. I can't put it in there so I'm kind of taking the practical aspects of it and dumping it in the middle here. I have to know where it's come from, but you don't take all that research based knowledge into the work you do and I think that's part of the difficulty of trying to get this kind of change to happen because you do only see those practical aspects. That was the kind of a balancing act for me trying to get the theory and the practice to kind of happen together when I'm totally immersed in the theory behind it, you know, and I'm kind of trying to apply it and practice it at the same time. So, I think that was part of the problem.*

Ok, so in terms of this change being sustainable, if David left tomorrow, would this change continue?

John: *At this point of time, maybe not. I think that it depends on the person coming in, their philosophies and the dynamics they create, but I don't think you could change the connectedness people have, other groups we formed, I think will still do what they can. But, I don't think will be quite...we're only just on the cusp, I don't think we have a long enough time, the PAVS have only just, had two meetings. So that's not entrenched in our culture, the fact that the person coming in will be so used to the old methodology of how a school is run, and this is quite distinctly different. The person coming in may not necessarily want this to happen. Are they necessarily going to understand enough to sit back and allow it to happen? That's the kind of thing that I think it's just not entrenched enough. Five years I think like you were saying before and I think that will be a different story because anyone coming in we will groom them. (Laughter and overlapping conversation as the group discuss what they might do with a new principal!)*

Julie: *I do, I think, at this point, even though PAVS have only been running for two weeks, we've seen the passion come out from the staff. We've seen our enthusiasm change in, six, seven months. And to see our position evolve to where it is now, you know, demonstrating leadership in terms of us, I think it would be very difficult for us if David was to go and leave and we had another principal come in, they obviously would need to have, some sort of induction about the way the leadership structure is happening at our school. I think if they didn't get it they would totally, I guess I doubt that they would be end up coming here. But, I think, we, as a group, would have to say to the principal, "Oh, this is how it needs to be done." And continue the work that we've done to this day. I think we've come such a long way even though it's a really short amount of time; I get that. But, we've really come a long way, and I think, the staff are finally on our side and are coming along for the ride*

with us, after the struggle that we've had. So, I think, for them to go back to where we were three years ago, will be difficult for them, as well as for us and I think we would be motivated enough and I think the staff, at that point, would be motivated enough, to continue structure; to continue it to develop and evolved, it may evolve into another form. But I think it probably will continue to grow and change for the better. Do, you know, what I mean? But I think it's not all doom gloom that if David left it's all going to fall and, it's going to come crashing down, and that's it.

John: *Oh, no it's not that!*

Sue: *You know, I think it's that idea of champions and custodians. Like if this leadership role breaks then the custodian kicks in, and if there were enough champions; strong enough champions, you would hope that that would continue through.*

Felicity: *I'm not perhaps not as confident as Julie but I'm on the same page as Julie, and I know that there's lots of different principals out there! So certainly, if you're lucky, but maybe not. I think perhaps Sal (other AP) and I would have a role to play here. I mean, if you came in here expecting a traditional sort of model, we would really have to be champions of what has happened in the past and that would we now do. And to make sure that the principal got to know just what powerful leadership we have within the group; how developed it is. And I suppose you have to sort want to convince them to give it a chance, you know, to, to take some time. That would be my approach. Would you give it a go, you know, would you sit back and watch how the model is working, you know, before you walked-in and changed it. It's a foolish principal, who walks in and changes things within the first 12 months. I think at principal school they are told that, you know, sit back and have a look at how the school's running. So that will be an opportunity and you know, I have such confidence in these people. We've got really good leaders in the making here and, I can't see them sitting back and... It's a little bit like when the Hub leaders, stood up and said, "No, we want a curriculum focus in the classroom." And, I think we really did sort of sit back then and think, "Oh! This is terrific!" And that's what we want, so...*

Paula: *So going on from this, do you see the Hub as an opportunity to mentor future leaders?*

Felicity: *Definitely. Yes, definitely. I think how lucky these young people are in having the opportunity because in the past there are some of us who have been given opportunities but I wouldn't say it was the norm. For these people it's a wonderful opportunity and I think to start when they are young and you know, and also to learn from them. We should never underestimate what young people have to offer to us and I think the balance between the two, is just of huge value to the education outcomes for the children.*

David: *In terms of sustainability, I think that at the moment in our system we have schools working on teacher-designed schools, we have schools working on the IDEA's concept, I think of this, which is similar in a lot of ways, or has common elements to those models as well. If this is to be sustained, the group, not an individual needs to be talking to people in the*

leadership team in the office (Catholic Education Office) and, someone used the word grooming, but I think we should be educating the community more in terms of what the model is, because then if the staff really want it, the onus is on the community representative to make the selection (of a new principal) and how to put that view forward strongly and if the officers of the Catholic Education Office are well informed as to what the model is, and how it operates, they would also then be listening to the community view of what it is they would be wanting in a future principal. Yeah, I think we've got a fair bit of work to do in that area as well.

Paula: *Okay. You recently facilitated the strategic planning day. What was it like for you?*

Larissa: *Just following on from what David said. I was thinking about that day (the Strategic Planning day) and the staff and how comfortable everybody felt and how supportive they were; certainly all the facilitators and all the sessions. The feedback has been quite positive about the day. I think the support and the recognition of the model is there that came through quite strongly. I think, over time, that that will just grow from strength to strength. But certainly, I think the staff can see the transparency, I think they can see that the communication lines are definitely open, and that they have a voice, and that they are respected, for their opinions, so I think the strategic planning day, that to me, was like, Wow, haven't we come a long way, in that, like the three years, to where, when I first walked in to where we are now. It was the best feeling.*

Julie: *The engagement of the staff was just incredible, and I was just thinking if we would've done it a year ago, or a year half ago, we would not have had the outcome that we got on that day. And it was just nothing, but positive talk, everyone was, every discussion was... it was happening and it was just so productive and such, you know, a brilliant day on everyone's behalf. That's what makes me think that, that's why I was saying that I didn't agree with you because that's where we've come from, and where we are today, and it makes me think that everyone is getting on board that makes me think "Well, if we are so keenly engaged in preparing and planning and being a part of the planning process for us all, for today and the future, it can't, it can't go!" It can't just be taken away if someone new was to come in because, I think there'll be too many people championing for the change to continue; to keep this evolutionary force to keep on going and it was, I think, it was such a positive day.*

John: *I was just going to say, I did a session on how you did an initial picture forming, say when you have an initiative for your PAV what's the process, and I was taken aback by the fact that I made a fictitious thing about something. And when we're talking about it, it was almost like you have to actually do this. Some of the things they said I thought "Oh my God, they think, they think this is going to happen." You know...there were so many people who were so passionate. "Where is this, and how do we ask the parents that? And what other kids that are left out significantly?" Wow that was actually...that was a big taken aback from me, because I am thinking, "Oh, here we are, I'll just use an example, and I'll give them the example."*

But the reality was, it came back to bite me because I thought, "I need to let, you know, this isn't actually real, it's not happening." I just tried to think of one that we weren't doing as opposed to one we are but, immediately, there was a lot of talk, and the general feel was very positive and I thought on that day, "Yeah, very good!"

Paula: *I think what changes is that people see that they have the opportunity to speak. It doesn't necessarily mean they take up that opportunity but the opportunity is there that allows you to then move forward. Because, they are, in reality agreeing to moving forward, you have my consent to move ahead with this plan. Not that we all have to come to some kind of agreement. So I think that's kind of shifting the playing field.*

David: *I thought that this Strategic Planning day made this the second turning point, the first one being the Open Space day, which was an amazing event to watch. I think this Strategic Planning day had every bit of the same energy and direction that came up, and the reassuring path for me was that there were eight or ten people running that day, actively and had put in the preparation and done the work. For me there's just no anxiety prior to the day about it working or not working, so to the plan swung in there, and if this is an acceptable process to the staff, you're backing them. I think that, that day will almost give us the mandate to be able to keep, moving and almost gives us imperative to move this small way forward, because I still think there's a number of good things we can do over the next number of years. But I think we would be doing it from a much more supportive position as a whole rather than over the past three years.*

Larissa: *Can I just go on from that too. I think also we had the parent involvement on those days and they were engaged as well, and, I think, leading on from that, then there was a SPAG night and certainly from what I've seen come out of those meetings we're all on the same page and it's just wonderful to see, so it's there in the community as well, but we need to get it out there more in the community.*

Paula: *So, did you do a different kind of work on the Strategic Planning night from say two years ago?*

Larissa: *Absolutely.*

John: *It was about them.*

Larissa: *Yes.*

John: *It wasn't about us.*

Larissa: *No.*

John: *It was about us just giving the outline and what you said in providing that opportunity ...it came from the staff really, everybody.*

David: *I think it was essentially about us, but not them or us. I think we really showed that it wasn't about us, and that's why I think we can keep moving in any direction we like. Reverse, upside-down, in which ever way.*

Scott: *I think, one of the important things with this process, and I noticed it twice, what David was saying on the Open Space, and on the, Strategic Planning day, that you give people a voice they're going to speak. When people were given a voice, when the staff was given a voice on the Open Space day, and then again on the Strategic Planning Day, the amount of speaking they did, and the amount of feedback they gave and the amount of ideas that they came up with, was overwhelming to a point I remember on one of those days, we kept on getting post-it notes, and there were too many coming through and we didn't, we had to work out systems of being able to sort those post-it notes out in you know, certain ways that we could understand how is it all going to work. And that, in itself shows the, the opinions, and passion, of the staff or group and their open-mindedness which has changed, over the past three years. As Felicity said before, three years ago, it would have been David, Sal and Felicity, and you wouldn't have got people responding the way they are now, so that development is, is really great to see. It's almost an evolution, I guess.*

Paula: ☺ *Any one got any closing comments to make?*

Adrienne: *I think, looking around at us, there are people smiling as they talk in here. I was thinking about the end of last year when we nearly killed each other and I'm just looking now, you know, like, smiling You know what, this is just a different trust and feel as a group. We've changed a lot. And I think it's maybe having an effect on everybody else.*

John: *So it's like the season finale of a, you know, feel good show.*

Conclusion to Parts 4 and 5

In Chapters 6 and 8 I have tried to capture the essence of how my research project unfolded in each setting. It is but a snapshot of the work that went on both inside the school and at my desk at the university as my co-participants and I engaged in reculturing and restructuring the schools. The work went on in other places as well as I dialogued and problem solved with my co-participants in cafes and pubs, at kitchen tables, walking around the river and alone gazing out to sea. My co-participants were working with the structure on a daily basis and grappling with the emerging conditions in their own way. That is how and where the evolution of this project took place. At both schools it continues to evolve as I let go of the reins and trust the people who care enough to believe, as I do, that we can make better decisions about the conditions that impact on our work. Those decisions form the basis for what we do in schools, what we choose to teach and how we teach it. Those decisions determine how resilient schools are in withstanding the buffeting caused by political expediency and poor decision making at higher levels of the

educational chain. To quote Smitherman (2005, p. 160) “A teacher may be restricted (bounded) by the national initiatives, state mandates, district criteria, school instructions, and curriculum concerns, but within these boundaries are infinite possibilities.”

My reasons for presenting the conversations for the most part intact in Chapters 7 and 9 are aligned to the beliefs expressed by Van Maanen (1988) that, as a reader, you should feel the emotion as you sit down alongside my co-participants and hear their stories first-hand. Whilst auto-ethnographic research draws largely from the interpretivist paradigm (P. Taylor, personal communication, November 10th, 2010), it is my co-participants who can best interpret their worlds; it is they who can bring themselves alive to the reader as they show the “what-ness of the pedagogic experience” (van Manen, 1990). In Part 6 of this thesis I will re position myself and don, once again, an interpretivist hat as I call on other researchers to help me explore what Kate, David, and the Learning Hub at Forrester Primary School can tell us about emerging leadership and the kind of reform efforts that will take our schools into a more promising and democratic future.

Part 6

Who and How: Leading and Transformation at the Speed of Change

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost

Overview

Throughout this thesis you have witnessed some of the many things that happen when teachers are given the opportunity to engage in deep dialogue about their work and their practice within a sociocratic structure and process of governance. The process of *doing* the research has allowed us to experience some of the answers to my research questions, in particular, what emerges and how we respond.

In this section I draw together the threads of my thinking by describing the holistic organisational framework for change that has developed out of my initial introduction to sociocratic governance. But first I must acknowledge that no framework is foolproof. Without the guiding hand of leaders who can champion improvement initiatives and provide the space and support necessary to nurture those emerging leaders who reside at every level of the school, a framework is of little value.

In Chapter 10 I reflect on the importance of leadership, and how it emerged as the most critical element in determining the success of a project such as this. I do so by describing my co-participants' experiences in the hope that they will enlighten us as to where the power for improvement lies in schools and who steps up to lead in this process of change – who is *allowed* to step up? I seek to support my own and my co-participants' experiences with reference to the literature on organisational change and leadership.

In Chapter 11, I conclude my thesis by reflecting on past reform efforts framed by business as usual thinking and describe the holistic organisational framework, an outcome of this project that may be useful for others engaged in organisational improvement. The framework was developed through the work my co-participants and I did each day as we restructured and recultured the school. In addition to our problem-solving-in-action, the framework reflects the wisdom of the many unknown people whose ideas triggered my thinking and led me to consider innovative ways to improve the way we engage together to create a learning organisation.

The framework is not enough of course and try as we might to tweak it, adapt it, pull it and push it, it is still only as good as the people who use it to reframe their thinking into a more democratic and participatory space. If those people who are the

custodians of their organisation's improvement remain true to guarding the process of change and continue guiding their organisation in the desired direction then it will carry on evolving and growing in innovative and sustainable ways.

Chapter 10: The Leadership Question

A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.

-Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

Introduction

Leadership emerged as a key consideration in my research project. I should have known that right from the start. As a facilitator of change I repositioned myself from a teacher, with access to certain ‘levels’ of the school, to a leader with a different kind of access, and as you already know that challenged me to confront the many preconceptions I had when I arrived at Beachlands. I imagined my research project as a process that would lead to the empowerment of anyone in the organisation who cared enough to do the work. Despite my past experiences I hopefully, and perhaps naively, believed that principals would want to empower their teachers and that assistant principals, such as Kate, who had complained that teachers needed to take greater responsibility, would be delighted when that happened. As you know, it didn’t quite happen that way and unless we understand the challenges people faced as they struggled to restructure the school we will have little success in adopting and promoting organisational change in other environments.

It’s not possible to talk about leadership without also considering trust and power, just two of the many threads that help weave the leadership story in this project. In this chapter I refer briefly to some of the leadership issues that helped me reflect on the questions I had about leadership and to consider what kind of leadership might be needed for schools to reculture and restructure into learning organisations.

So What About Leadership?

A search of the literature on leadership reveals a plethora of labels that try to capture the essence of leadership. There’s parallel, distributed, resonant, empathetic, positive, teacher, student, top-down, bottom-up, hero, great, wise, effective, moral, visionary, team, delusional, charismatic, emotional, educational, ethical, shared, transactional, transformational, vertical, relational, authentic, democratic, moral, mutual, constructivist, adaptive, breakthrough, primal and, in the currency of the day, sustainable – just some of the adjectives used in the literature to describe leadership.

Then there are the metaphorical images of leadership - leadership as process; as stewardship; as machine; as network, as flock of birds; as conductor; as MIDWIFE!

Towards the end of my research project I had the opportunity to visit Washington State University at Pullman, Washington USA, as a visiting scholar. The focus of the two-week long summer institute was leadership and each day the students, all educational leaders, dialogued about the complex issue of leadership and what it means to lead. In one session we made a list of all the attributes we believed a leader of change needed to have. It resembled a supermarket shopping list of all possible ingredients one might need in every possible scenario – focussed, servant, voiceful, motivator, ethical, enabler, brave, transparent, vulnerable, inclusive, honest, influencer, enabler, goals driven, personable, communicator, protector and defender, intuitive, truthful- the list went on and on.

The professor leading the discussion asked us to consider whether we were talking about ourselves or an aspirational version of leadership that is “out there”. She made the comment that she would “die trying to be all those things (on the list) so I try to keep it simple. As a leader of organisational improvement I continually ask myself, “What is it you’re seeing? But more importantly, what is it you’re not seeing?” (personal notes from workshop discussion, July 2011). She seemed to be asking us to be open to emerging possibilities as leaders and not to become bogged down in defining leadership traits and attributes. Something that we are all in danger of doing as debates about what leadership is and is not, frameworks and processes for understanding leadership and defining the work of leadership fill volumes and add to the confusing and intractable nature of leadership in complex environments. Leadership in any scenario seems to be big business.

The focus on trying to define and capture the ultimate wisdom of leadership exudes desperation as the descriptors become increasingly obtuse and unfathomable. Wallowing in a sea of words devoted to revealing the mysteries of leadership one questions the pluck of the lone claimant who declares; “successful leadership is not mysterious” (Pagonis, 2001, p. 125). That claim aside, the aim of my research was not to add to the swell of literature associated with leadership but to briefly identify the aspects of leadership, from the abundance of current research already available,

and from the experiences of my co-participants and myself, that might enable schools to become resilient, adaptable learning organisations. Could we help define the Sociocratic leader?

Fitzgerald and Gunter point out (2008) that both the practice and definition of leadership is slippery and elusive while being highly prized and sought after in nearly every field of endeavour, so I don't lay claim to being any more certain as to the mysteries of leadership than I was before I began this project. However, to paraphrase Bob Dick, respected elder statesman of facilitation in Australia, while a leader might describe their natural style as closer to *laissez-faire* there may be occasions which justify reaching for a piece of psychological 4" X 2" (1991). In other words, the kind of leader an organisation needs is often determined by the context and environment in which they do their work; an environment of increasing unpredictability and change (Cummings & Worley, 2009).

Given those constraints, I think you would agree that no clear definition of leadership comes out of my research project. However, I think you would also agree that, in response to one of my research questions, yes, at least some teachers do have the capacity to step up and lead their peers in reculturing and restructuring their schools. Many of my co-participants did so nervously, hesitantly, fearfully and yet they still took the risk and wanted to be part of what they saw as an exciting opportunity. The people who stepped up to lead came from all levels of the school and from all age groups. If the McKinsey and Company report (2007), already mentioned on p.177, is even partially right in identifying leadership as the most critical factor in determining school success then perhaps we can learn something from listening closely to what my co-participants had to say about their experiences.

Take David, the principal at Forrester, for example. The overriding characteristics that gave us permission to do the work of reculturing as we restructured the school was his acknowledgement that "we have a problem" and an ability to live with uncertainty. He did say that he felt a level of frustration at times but he had a clear picture of the future he wanted for his school, he expressed it publicly and clearly over and over again, and he was able to live with his frustration while his co leaders found their own way (Wheatley, 2006). In Tedlow's words, David had "the courage

to bet on a vision” (2001, p. 74). He told us that it was like the Pike Street Market in Seattle where the people working in the organisation were its most valuable advocates and resource (Caldwell, 2006).

David was a *mindful* leader who expected the unexpected and trusted that he and his people would find a way to respond that would move his school in the desired direction (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). Sometimes that meant he called on me to help the Leadership Team or Learning Hub think differently about a problem. What we saw was David sharing the responsibility for finding answers and underpinning everything was a sense of trust that, together, we would. He acted on the advice from authors such as Attwood, Pedler, Pritchard and Wilkinson who consider that “Leadership across whole systems...requires a particular focus on team working” (2003, p. 71). On the other hand, Robert, at Beachlands, appeared to have a low level of trust in both the process and in the people doing the work of guiding organisational change. As individuals took risks with their newly won freedom to introduce proposals in meetings they quickly retreated when they realised that not everything was up for discussion. When Kate presented her proposal to deal with teacher stress she quickly withdrew when confronted with the dawning realisation that her principal took it as a personal affront. Bev tells us that she knows the principal doesn’t trust her, “even though he’d say he does.”

Very early on in the process, David asked me what I thought about him withdrawing from the Learning Hub and letting the leaders at that level get on with the job. I agreed wholeheartedly as it fitted with the emergent nature of sociocracy where the members of each circle belonged because they do the work of that circle. Their reason for existing was determined by their purpose, in sociocratic terms called a binding proposition. David saw very quickly that he did not do the work of the Learning Hub so he trusted his people to work it out while he went on with *his* work. He did say to me at one point that he knew he had the power to say, “*Oh for goodness sake, just get on with it!*” But he said he also knew that that “*wasn’t the right thing to do*”.

At Beachlands, Robert never relinquished ownership of the Learning Hub. Right up to the day he left to go on long-service leave we’ve been told by Kate how he not only controlled the agenda but the whole tone of the meeting and what was able to be

achieved. While the Learning Hub at Forrester was left alone by David to struggle and question, and even throw tantrums in their quest to develop as leaders, the Learning Hub at Beachlands more resembled a flock of sheep being herded into the pen each meeting and emerging none the wiser.

So it would seem that trust – being trusted by others and trusting in yourself – might play a big part in successfully leading at every level of the organisation. Duignan (2006) certainly thinks so. He considers that it is trust that enables an organisation to improve and, “when trust is breached there is a tendency to retreat to the classical organisational model...and withdrawal to a hierarchical and bureaucratic form of control” (p. 24). In the Learning Pod at Beachlands we heard Sally say in her closing round comment that trust enabled her to overcome the constraints that were stopping her from learning from her peers. In my focussed conversation with the Learning Hub at Forrester, trust was mentioned many times as the factor that allowed the organisation to move forward in the desired direction. When mutual trust, the basis of sociocratic governance, is experienced by participants as the source of power in decision making, only then can the organisation improve (Buck & Villines, 2007).

How important is endowed leadership in embracing transformative change? I asked this question as I reflected on my research problem and considered what part the people in paid and titled positions of power would have in reculturing and restructuring the school. Without doubt the principal’s role is the ultimate decider and without his/her full and transparent support for change the energy invested in transforming the school is largely wasted. What became apparent very early on in the project, however, was the power assistant principals play in determining the pace and future of organisational change. According to Wheatley (in Joyce, 2010) in traditional school governance structures, information is used as a source of power, handed out in frugal, fragmented packages with a view to control. In a sociocratic organisation information is the currency of transformational learning. Information flow is the life-giving force that enables the whole organisation to be connected and healthy. In both Beachlands and Forrester information initially became blocked at the level of the assistant principals who had the power to hold on to it or to move it on. In my experience the sociocratic structure impacts most on the assistant principal level of the organisation. It initially takes away the traditional “jobs” that they have always done and leaves a space for them to re-vision a different

kind of leadership. In the corporate world they are the middle managers who ensure that the organisational wheels run smoothly. In primary schools they do the meeting agenda and chair the meetings, they do the timetables and duty rosters and meet with the principal to discuss staffing issues. They manage things. They smooth the waters. But, as Buchanan and Badham point out, “having a basis for power is not enough. The individual must act” (p. 11). In a sociocratic organisation they play a critical role as actors in the role of agent of change - a role that deserves to be explored in greater depth and I will do so in a further publication. You have witnessed Kate’s struggle through the process of changing the kind of work she would be required to do under sociocratic governance, and at Forrester we saw the younger members of the Learning Hub excluded from critical discussions by the longer serving members until they finally spoke up.

The notion of leadership one might subscribe to in a sociocratic organisation is far too complex to do justice to it here but in the context of my research it is strongly linked to a desire to improve (Davis & Brighouse, 2008). If improvement is the desired outcome of reculturing and restructuring, then leading becomes a matter of scanning the environment, *sniffing* the conditions, responding and doing. It requires adaptability and vigilance and determining who needs the authority to act, enabling those actors and trusting them to do the work. It is a notion of leadership that can hardly be prescribed, it is rather an unfolding of awareness; both a struggle and a gentle awakening. It may include all or some of the elements of leadership embedded in the definitions mentioned above but it will have more of a *feel* to it rather than a particular label as people find the rhythm of responding to emergent conditions in a system under constant change. A future evolution of this research might be to focus on the concept of the Learning Hub as a way to develop leadership in action. From what my co-participants told me, the active struggle, the constant dialogue with their peers, the investment in a long-term commitment to change and doing purposeful work was the key to their transformation.

Leaders as Life-Long Learners

I expect that in reading this thesis my success or continued struggle to achieve my objectives will be self evident. What is not yet clear, however, is the degree to which my co-participants were motivated by the work we were doing to pursue their own

learning. The notion of a school as a learning community has been widely explored in the literature as a means for schools to grow and evolve with the changing needs of society. While not disregarding the value of collective learning, I was more interested in knowing whether individuals involved in my research project would take it upon themselves to explore further and learn more about the complex ideas that they were being confronted with every day. I believed that the sociocratic governance structure and associated innovations would only take root and flourish in the schools if the participants, as leaders of change, had the desire to pursue answers to their own questions. My thinking was supported by Kouzes and Posner (2002) who claim to have discovered ways in which learning and leadership are directly related and state clearly that “Leaders are simply great learners” (p.216).

At Beachlands I was initially struck by the lack of questions my co-participants asked about my project considering it was turning their world upside down. It made me rather anxious that they would put so much trust in me and not question why I was doing what I was doing. The sociocratic governance structure promised to provide participants with greater opportunities for democratic participation, considered to be “an important means of self-development and producing individuals who are more tolerant of difference, sensitive to reciprocity, better able to engage in moral discourse and judgement, and more self reflective” (Mezirow, 2003, p. 62). Would that promise be realised if individuals failed to explore the opportunities for deeper learning on their own behalf?

What I mostly experienced during my year at Beachlands was an outward acceptance of change without question despite the obvious struggle individuals had in understanding the thinking behind implementing such a change. On reflection, perhaps the missing ingredient at Beachlands was a culture that encouraged asking questions. Holloman, Rouse and Farrington (2007) consider that the culture of the school must support educators to ask why. At Forrester the members of the Learning Hub questioned everything right from the start and challenged me to find different ways for them to self-seek answers to their questions. The culture at Forrester would seem to align with Doyle’s belief that environments where “teachers feel comfortable challenging the status quo in favour of new ideas...promote teacher leadership that is not only empowered but also informed about democratic and socially just purposes” (2004, p. 198).

A Case for Action Research

A different version of this research project might see my co-participants engaged in their own research studies alongside mine. The stage was intrinsically set for co learning and perhaps today, long after I've survived the events that challenged and tripped me over time and time again, I would be brave enough to suggest that teachers could formalise their learning journey via action research whilst reculturing and restructuring their school.

During my visit to Washington State University, mentioned earlier in this chapter, my fellow students were engaged in action research projects as part of their degree requirements. I spent many hours in discussion with them as they tried to formalise their research questions in preparation for presenting and defending their proposals. There was some resistance within the class to the notion of *having* to do action research and it made me wonder what comes first, the methodology or the question - if not action research, then what? It seemed that the biggest barrier confronting these budding researchers was that they had to involve others in their studies. *How can we do that?* They asked. *Is it fair to ask other people to be part of our research and work hard on it while we get the degree?* I could see their point and while I hoped that the co-participants in my research would want to know more about organisational change it was enough at the time for me to struggle through without formally involving others.

But what if co research was part of the mix? Would action research fit the bill as a methodology? According to Yin (2011), action research is a collaborative study that is planned right from the start, a description that doesn't subscribe to the emerging methodology in my research project. Lichtman (2010, P. 243) tells us that action research "focuses on a solution to a specific local problem" and that too is not a description that I could apply to my research question. However, a call to action was never-the-less an embedded aspect of the sociocratic governance model. Whether we captured it or not, my co-participants were engaged in a version of the 'look, think, act' cycle that traditionally defines action research (Esposito & Smith, 2006). You might recall a critical aspect of the sociocratic governance structure requires decisions to be made via a process of proposals that enforce deliberation. Esposito and Smith (2006) refer to this in their action research study as "taking stock",

requiring a more holistic understanding of the context in which decisions are made rather than “jumping to solutions” (p. 49).

Elliott considers that “Educational Action Research involves teachers making and creating *educationally* [italics in original] worthwhile changes in their classrooms and other learning environments” (2010, p. 1). Would he consider reculturing and restructuring a school into a more democratic environment educationally worthwhile? A search of the literature reveals that action research is most often promoted as a way for individual teachers to improve their classroom practice, particularly as reflective practitioners (Harrison, Lawson & Wortley, 2005; Nason & Whitty, 2007). Avgitidou (2009) takes a different approach in her action research project by studying the roles and participation of those involved in it. In doing so she explores many of the themes that were revealed in my project - roles and relationships, democracy, decision making, knowledge ownership and trust - to name a few.

It is, however, Whitehead and McNiff’s (2006) vision of action research that strikes a chord with me as I contemplate future iterations of my research project that might also involve my co-participants as researchers. The authors go beyond exploring the question – “How can I improve my practice?” (Whitehead, 2000) to ask - how can I, as an expression of my values, “contribute to the wellbeing of humanity” (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006, p. 166)? It is this more global view of action research that seems to fit with the notion of an individual (educator) as a communicatively competent democratic citizen. The Expanding Circles framework for organisational change, described in Chapter 11, provides opportunities to “transform the normative conditions of current social formations” as suggested by Whitehead & McNiff (p. 110). Therefore an action research study within such a conceptual framework would do what I believe is an embedded requirement in my research project and commit to “transformative communicative action” (p. 110).

Conclusion

Whether my research project was a driver for my co-participants to pursue their own learning opportunities or not is something I can’t claim to know conclusively.

However, Kate, the assistant principal at Beachlands, recently enrolled to do a PhD on the impact of global policy on the local educational arena - something she admits

to never having considered prior to the work she did as a co-participant in my project. She tells me she wants to back-track from the school to find out how policy determined “out there” is

translated through the systems to end up in schools as a fait-accompli. I'm so excited about this. I've never really thought about policy before but thinking about conditions and how we respond to them...well I want to be stronger...have stronger knowledge.”.

(Personal communication, June, 2010)

At Forrester, David briefly alluded to John's scholarship in his discussion with me, however, John is but one of four members of the Learning Hub who have begun Master of Leadership studies this year. I often receive emails from them asking for guidance in finding literature that relates to the work we are doing. A recent email from John provided us all with food for thought about the hopeful work we are doing in schools. It is a good place to end this brief reflection on leadership before going on to describe the framework for transformative change.

Hey Paula, Just thought I'd let you know I got an A for my assignment. Had to laugh though...the comment on it was that I was TOO POSITIVE about my school and what we were doing here! Can you believe that! Gotta laugh! See you Wednesday. J

(personal communication, Sept, 2010)

Chapter 11: Transformation at the speed of change

The transformational paradigm transcends the rational planning process. It is concerned with deep change – with exploring new areas, trying new methodologies, and reaching new goals. The means to the desired end cannot be specified; they can only be learned as part of a risky, action-learning process.

Quinn, *Building the bridge as you walk on it*, 2004, p. 125

Introduction

Throughout the time I spent in schools working with teachers and leadership teams to improve the way they organise and make decisions one phrase kept being repeated over and over like a mantra, peppering almost every conversation, the focus of every document and every staff meeting. As I researched organisational reform, or indeed any attempt at reform in schools, that same phrase - *improved student performance* - provided the impetus for many investigations (Davis & Brighouse, 2008). It is the reason why schools say they exist, why teachers teach, why they plan and test and assess, why they go to professional development. And yet, there's something fundamentally wrong with the way that the phrase trips off the tongues of educators, as though by saying it whatever we do next will naturally lead towards that outcome.

The questions that I didn't hear asked at Beachlands or Forrester were - what are we improving from-to? What does the ultimate student performance look like? How will we know when students get there? What are they improving for? What is the world that we are educating for *improved student performance* going to look and be like in 15, 10 or even 5 years? The unasked question - are we enabling our students to be citizens in a world of increasing uncertainty and indeterminate futures – hung in the air while valuable time, where limited face-to-face dialogue is available to teachers, is spent deciding where the portable toilet will be located while the building program is going on, how the budget will be determined, and whether or not we'll have buddy classes this year. Like the merry-go-round at the fairground, the school year starts with a new lick of paint, the teachers hop on their horses and, with gleeful optimism, begin the first rotation only to find, a few weeks into Term 1, that they're not going to a new destination after all. Despite the extra work they've put

in, time spent rewriting programs of work, discovering new themes to engage their students, the same problems arise like mechanical failures that hide beneath the shiny surface of the ageing carousal. Teachers are repeatedly confronted with the same old problems of how to engage the reluctant learner, how to fit everything into a crowded curriculum, how to extend the gifted student. How to teach spelling, what to do with the child who refuses to read, and how come the dishes are still being left on the sink when the sign clearly says, **“WASH UP AFTER YOURSELF! Please”**. The problems become all consuming, urgent and troublesome, and as the heat of complexity confronts business-as-usual gaffer tape is pulled out to make a few on-the-spot fixes in the hope that the ride can continue for a few more rotations.

This chapter considers past reform efforts in light of a world in a constant state of flux. It describes a possible way for schools to get off the carousel and move towards a state of constant improvement. It brings together the practices developed throughout this research project in discussion with colleagues and in engaging with creative thinkers from a wide range of disciplines who challenged my previously held beliefs. The framework for Enabling Resilient Schools at the Speed of Change is a prototype born out of theory put into practice (Scharmer, 2007). As such, it is dynamic and adaptable according to prevailing conditions in each environment and the capabilities and networks of the players engaged in the reform process. It is not a recipe for change but rather an enabler for schools (leaders) to *manage* the complex and ever-changing need to remain relevant into and beyond the futures we have the capacity to currently imagine. In pursuing the call for improved student performance, the framework that my co-participants and I developed creates conditions that the literature states is necessary for nurturing effective teachers. It provides space for leadership to emerge at every level and for the moral purpose of the school to be clearly envisioned and lived out each day (Fullan, 2007).

Business as usual, well, why not!

Pick up any book on business these days and you'll find an attack on the notion that *business as usual* will provide organisations with the processes, strategies and capabilities to meet the needs of a complex world that is unfolding before us. So too in education; as far back as 1997 Cincinnati Public Schools (Supovitz, 2002) were claiming that its *Students First* project was “changing business as usual”. The

assumption being that *business as usual*, or doing what we've always done, does not deliver the goods and so we need to do something else. Friedman (2007) pulls no punches in dragging education into the discussion on why we should stop doing what we've been doing over the last fifty years or so. In describing a 'flat-world' environment, a world in which traditional trade and economic boundaries no longer exist to shore up local employment opportunities, Friedman calls for schools to reorient what students are learning and how educators are teaching in order to adapt to the changing conditions of global employment and the versatility needed to thrive in an uncertain world. Caldwell and Spinks (2008) provide five reasons why the status quo can no longer meet the challenge of improving conditions to ensure student success, and in doing so point out that "a focus on school improvement has only got us so far."

While it seems that *business as usual* will not meet the needs of our future citizens or even provide a way to deal with the current predicament of improving student performance, it is less clear what business as usual actually is. Is it a problem with the way we educate teachers? Is it the crowded curriculum and how schools are asked to do more and more with less and less? Is it that students are less motivated today than they were yesterday? Is it all these things and a whole lot more that we never get around to discussing in the context of a school day, a year, or a decade? However we are inclined to define business as usual it seems that whatever schools are doing, whatever their usual business is, apart from small pockets of creative reform, schools are not happy with what they do and how they do it and therefore constantly seek ways to do their work better.

What becomes apparent however is that in seeking solutions to improve student performance business as usual usually means attempts at reform are fragmented, short term, on-the-surface fixes for what are often problems with the underlying culture of the school that, in the interests of keeping everything manageable and simple, are left sleeping deeply under the surface in the hope that hidden pathologies will not be revealed (Davis & Brighouse, 2008). Seeking solutions to improve student performance is often a case of as you solve one problem another arises (Supovitz, 2002). So many principals pushed for time and a need to be seen to be keeping the merry-go-round functioning leave well enough alone in the hope that by

continuing to do more of the same they will “muddle through” (Scharmer, 2007). As one principal put it,

You just don't want to go there! Things have worked more-or -less effectively for as long as I can remember so why stir up a hornet's nest?

(interview transcript, 2008).

The desire not to stir up a hornet's nest lies at the heart of leadership, complexity and the need to work in a different way. To that end, this innovation embraces complexity and provides a process and product for schools to shift from sites of business as usual to business at the cutting-edge of reform in order to remain relevant. In doing so it allows business as usual to hold organisations in place while the reform process is undertaken, thereby keeping the hornets, to some degree, in their nest until by natural attrition the new order becomes the way business is done.

Enabling Resilient Schools at the Speed of Change: Getting Started

The framework (see Figure Eleven) consists of three inter-linking elements, or holons, that fit together to enable schools to constantly improve while going about their day-to-day work. I have called the elements *Expanding Circles* as a way of signalling an evolution away from the “pure” brand of Sociocracy that I introduced at the beginning of this project into a governance structure that emerges and was uniquely different in each school. Although I started the project believing that Sociocratic governance would provide opportunities for greater organisational learning and enable schools to reculture and restructure it soon became clear that the *big picture* was missing for many people. Organisational mapping was introduced as a way to address this problem and provide a way for the school to position their work within both global and local conditions. The third element, Expanding Circles of Facilitation, emerged in answer to a cry from members of the Learning Hubs at both schools that they didn't believe they had the skills to lead their peers. That led me to developing a facilitator course for teacher leaders.

The way each element was introduced depended on many things. The vital ingredient in determining the way the framework evolved, and its eventual success at Forrester and Beachlands, depended on the kind of visionary leadership at-every-level that we attempted to identify in Chapter 10. Such leadership is embedded in the

organisational story that is enacted through the Expanding Circles framework for change. Without it the degree to which schools are enabled to reform and are able to maintain their capacity to affect sustainable transform is limited to the kind of reform discussed earlier in this chapter.

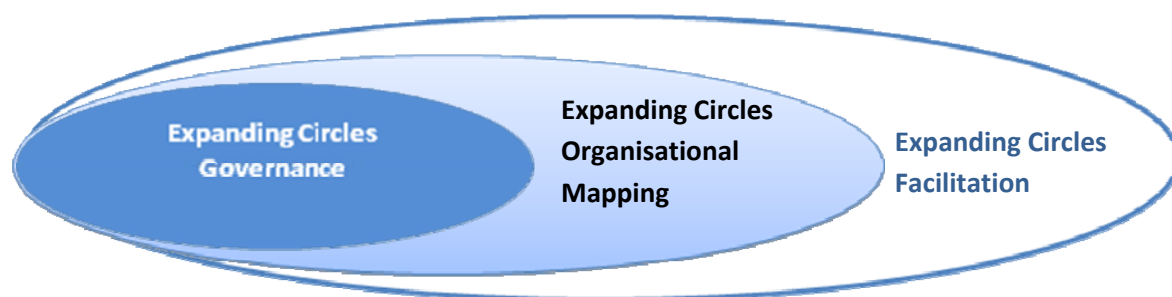


Figure Eleven: The 3 interlinking elements of the Expanding Circles framework

Expanding Circles Governance

The first element in the framework is the modified sociocratic governance structure, Expanding Circles Governance that determines how members of an organisation meet and make decisions and how information flows throughout the organisation. The governance structure determines who is responsible for what, and who is held accountable. It is the heart or the engine-room of an organisation- the place where the organisation is held accountable to its expressed values, its mission, its purpose and its desired destination. It is both a structure and a process to:

- improve the flow of quality information that cycles around the organisation;
- clearly identify who is responsible for making decisions at which level and who is accountable for those decisions;
- determine the roles that need to be undertaken at each level;
- make decisions that are oriented to action;
- give everyone an equal opportunity to participate;
- allow all stakeholders to respectfully contribute to school improvement;
- improve meeting outcomes and processes; and

- keep all elements linked and informed.

Everyone in the organisation belongs to at least one circle of influence that has an expressed purpose, called a binding proposition. Each individual articulates their own theory of practice that is aligned to the purpose of each circle which, in turn, is aligned to the greater purpose of the organisation (Degenhardt & Duignan, 2010). Expanding Circles Governance strongly aligns to the principles of Sociocracy and identifies and engages all stakeholders in creating a dynamic learning organisation under constant improvement. Further information about the Sociocratic Governance Structure can be found in Appendix A.

As the governance structure began to fall into place, and people became less resistant to the elements of the meeting structure that initially challenged them there emerged a need for something else. At Forrester we began having conversations about how to capture all the learning that was going on. It felt like we had uncovered the complexity of the organisation but it was in danger of getting away on us. We wanted to find a way of visually mapping how we were doing our work so that everyone could see it as it evolved and that the people doing the work could be clearly recognised.

I realised that the governance structure was only part of the organisational story and I needed to find a way of placing what we were doing in schools into the bigger picture of global change. In Appendix B you will see how my initial thinking was captured on paper as I referred back to the literature and listened to what my co-participants said about feeling as though things were getting out of hand. I developed my thinking further (Appendix C) as I looked for order to come out of the chaos I'd created, and if you look at Appendix D you'll see how it looked at Forrester by the time I left the scene.

As with Expanding Circles Governance, Organisational Mapping is also a structure and a process. It is a visual representation of the organisation under constant change. Its purpose is to:

- identify the work that is being done in the organisation, by whom and at what stage each initiative is in a process from incubation to evaluation;

- identify clear custodians and champions to drive initiatives;
- allow for passionate individuals to innovate in line with the organisation's defined destination;
- link all essential aspects of the organisation, such as the Vision and Mission Statement, Theories of Practice, the defined destination;
- assist leaders in identifying conditions that impact on the organisation, from global to local, and determine how they fit with the existing work being done;
- provide a snapshot of an organisation in time and over time;
- ensure in-built individual and organisational accountability; and
- align the organisation to system initiatives and work with Expanding Circles Governance as a way to achieve success.

Organisational mapping allows a school to embrace emerging conditions as the natural order in a complex world. The curriculum is no longer considered crowded but is deliberately selected to best fit the journey towards the ultimate destination that leads to improved student performance, however that may be defined in each environment.

At Forrester and several other schools that I have worked with over the past three years, Expanding Circles Organisational Mapping has taken the place of the traditional strategic plan. A description of how organisational mapping was developed and introduced at Forrester can be found in Appendix E.

With the first two elements in place, my co-participants at Beachlands and Forrester worked together to realise the reculturing and restructuring of the school. The champion of the organisational map changed and adapted it, often on a daily basis, but there was still something missing. While the agents of change, the people in the Learning Hubs and Leadership Teams, felt that they were developing and growing in their understanding of leading in complex systems, they still had doubts about leading others. There were still pockets of resistance within the general staff that they didn't know how to respond to. I thought about how much I had learnt by undertaking specific training and learning in facilitating and I wanted to share that

with my co-participants. It wasn't enough to simply model it; we had to go deeper into the skills, strategies and protocols for dealing with the more resistant people and learn how to reveal their hidden passions and desires and how to encourage them to join the organisation in moving forward. Now seemed to be the right time to introduce the third element into the reculturing and restructuring framework.

My thinking, once again guided by research, resulted in designing and writing a five module facilitator's course specifically for educators. See Appendix F for an example of Module 1. The five modules that made up the facilitators course were delivered over a period of three terms throughout 2010. Each module –

Module 1: Awakening the Facilitator Within,

Module 2: Preparing your Organisation to Learn,

Module 3: Planning for Sustainable Organisational Learning,

Module 4: Communication for Sustainable Organisational Learning, and

Module 5: Protocols and Strategies for Sustainable Organisational Learning -

was developed to address the needs expressed by the Learning Hub leaders at each school through our discussions. While Module 1 was carefully pre-planned the subsequent modules were developed around the needs of the group as they emerged. Case studies of real dilemmas experienced by the participants provided opportunities for collaborative problem solving and a safe environment for role-playing change leadership.

Each topic was run as a 4-hour module, delivered as 2 x 2 hour sessions every fortnight after school. The intervening week gave participants time to put theory in to practice in the Learning Pods and Hubs. Participants from Forester and Beachlands participated together in the course as well as several teachers from a variety of other nearby schools, including some high school teachers, realising my dream to bring educators together to learn from each other. In my conversation with Kate you heard her explain the value that the course brought to her leadership. Another participant said:

It was exactly what I needed. The skills that you learn in doing the course you're able to put into practice straight away. There are scenarios that you

go through and you're able to think, "Okay, if that kind of thing happens this is the best way to deal with it."

(Participant feedback, August, 2010)

The facilitator's course seemed to provide opportunities to fulfil the need, expressed in the literature, that teachers should have time to learn together and from each other (Davis, 2005). Teamed with the governance structure and organisational mapping a holistic framework for reculturing and restructuring schools was collaboratively realised.

Conclusion 1

Expanding Circles Governance, Expanding Circles Organisational Mapping and Expanding Circles Facilitation link together to create a possible framework for transformative change. It is a framework that has been captured in time as it evolved out of my research project and the two studies at Beachlands and Forrester that were driven by my quest to find answers to the emerging research questions raised in Chapter 1. In keeping with my beliefs about complexity that underpin this thesis and are expressed in Part 2, I anticipate that this framework will change and adapt in different ways at Forrester and Beachlands as the agents of change, the leaders who emerge at every level, grow in confidence to make decisions about what they and their organisations need to continue improving. If I had two wishes for a future evolution of this research it would be:

1. To have the necessary resources to work with Learning Hubs in many different schools, to bring them together to learn from each other, and
2. That the value of organisational learning would be acknowledged as a vital precursor to improved student performance. Providing a place in educational organisations for teachers to develop as communicatively competent, democratic citizens who can consider deeply complex problems and make decisions after careful deliberation recognising that democracy is "both a process and substance" and can provide a "viable direction for intelligent and moral decision-making by school administrators" (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 31).

Forrester Principal David's wish is for a designer to take the organisational map created by all the stakeholders at Forrester into the digital age. His wish is to be able to share the dynamic evolution of the school as it emerges and adapts in real time, thereby creating an insight into the complex life world that he and his teachers inhabit. Perhaps David foresaw the push, described in the following coda, for their story to be told and understood beyond the boundary and beyond traditional ways of engaging with parents and the broader community. Perhaps he was looking for a way to begin the conversation for, as Teaching Australia's, *Teaching for Uncertain Futures* (2008) publication states, "engaging (parents and the broader community) in the work of the school will be increasingly important in worlds that are highly fragmented..."

We have seen how John at Forrester anticipated that scenario with some trepidation. The Expanding Circles framework provides schools and the individuals within them with the structure and processes necessary to become organisations of active, communicatively competent citizens thereby enabling them to engage in constant and deliberate improvement towards clearly defined futures.

Epilogue

As expected, life after my research project goes on both in and out of my host schools as I return to my desk at university to construct the final document. Life *has* gone on but the sudden convergence with which recent events have occurred deserves to be revealed in this coda. The following events highlight some important considerations for those wishing to envision a more democratic society. On a day-to-day basis emerging pressures often impact on organisations in the form of advocates wanting their voices to be heard. While citizen participation may be considered part of the process of a democratic society, in the events described below, which all occurred during November, 2010 as I finalised my research project, they are also the driver of change. The following information came to me via first hand conversations with the participants, or as a participant in the events myself.

Beachlands Primary School

On the surface sociocracatic governance appeared to be embedded at Beachlands. Everything was certainly in place but so many constraints had been put around the process it was hard to tell what was actually allowed and not allowed; what was a planned for initiative and what was not. In Term 3, Robert, as the principal, was reviewed by two external reviewers who spent time in the school interviewing teachers, school board members, students and various other stakeholders. The process was part of a three-yearly review that all principals are subject to and, in theory, they are anonymous. In practice the teachers selected to be part of the review process mobilized. They saw it as an opportunity to speak out and what they spoke about was how Robert had denied them the right to sociocratic decision making. They also took the opportunity to question the legitimacy of Robert's daughter as a staff member at Beachlands.

Towards the end of the term Robert received his review report and the fall-out was immediate. Robert and his daughter, Amanda, were both preparing to go on long-service leave in term 4 and they exited in a blaze of glory. Robert had been told by his reviewers that, at a minimum, his daughter would have to leave the school. Other constraints were imposed that, in the light of what happened afterwards, are no longer relevant. Robert responded by calling all the staff together and furiously

admonished them for their lack of loyalty to him and for speaking about his daughter. The bulk of the staff was astounded as most had not been part of the review process, and shouldn't it have been confidential anyway? Amanda, Robert's daughter, told her students that all the teachers had signed a petition to get rid of her. I want you to picture here the swell of information surging throughout the organisation and beyond as the gossip and rumour mill swung into action. The two assistant principals tried to stem the flow but it was impossible to control the outpouring of anger-fuelled misinformation from both sides of the dilemma. On the last day of school Robert sent out his last newsletter for the term. It contained a bomb that was to mobilise the parents and the education sector governing body throughout Term 4. Robert announced via the newsletter that the traditional leadership camp for students would not be held in 2011 as he was "hanging up his sleeping bag". Robert had left the premises by the time the first parent registered the full extent of his words.

If Robert returns to Beachlands in 2011 it will be under very different circumstances. In his absence one of his deputies has undertaken the position of acting principal. The parents refused to accept that the camp had been cancelled and went to the education governing body for support. Ongoing community engagement has been necessary to defuse the situation and rebuild relationships. The camp has been rebooked. The clear message from the parents was, "Don't mess with the school camp!" A consultant from the governing body visits the school each week to collaborate with the leadership team, to support them in their decision making and to ensure that all stakeholders are fully informed. I predict that now the parents have found their democratic voice it won't be silenced again easily. The question is how can the school engage in purposeful dialogue that encourages all voices to be heard or is this an instance of a different set of voices taking the place of the one that has left?

While all this was going on what about the sociocratic governance structure? The leadership team immediately put in place the initiatives that had been missing from the mix. The Learning Hub has been opened up to all comers and has been revitalised and a new initiative called *Wow Moments* has encouraged teachers to be self-reflective by engaging in peer observations. A significant and entirely unanticipated off-shoot from my project occurred recently when the assistant principals interviewed new staff for 2011.

Although it is not represented in this thesis due to expediency, I introduced sociocratic governance into a third school in 2009 and I continue to work with them as a mentor and coach as required. Several temporary teachers from that school applied for permanent jobs recently advertised at Beachlands. Both interviewers and interviewees considered their knowledge of the sociocratic process added value to their applications. Two of the teachers were hired.

Dust Cloud Unlimited⁵⁹

In the meantime, I had a niggling feeling that as I wrote myself towards the conclusion of my thesis I was also writing myself to the end of a luxuriously self indulgent period of my life as a full-time student. Work - I probably needed to consider life post PhD but events at Beachlands sickened me to the thought of re-entering the education arena I had left so thoroughly disillusioned years before. You might have read where David and his Leadership team agreed with me that there is a role for someone like me in education but convincing the authorities to take on such an initiative requires more energy than this one person has. So before I had the time to conceptualise what was after all a less than pleasant necessity to make a living an opportunity found me.

I was invited to take on the role of Communications and Community Relationships Advisor for an industry group south of Perth. The job description was open for negotiation but I soon found myself as if a stone dropped into water – the ripple effects of my presence in the company created an immediate disturbance and the dominos began to tumble. The company rubs boundaries with rapidly expanding urban encroachment and many past decisions, made on a gentleman's handshake in less complex times, were beginning to fray. The community I had been hired to engage was outraged by the impact of my new employer, its perceived disregard for their health and well being, and a lack of sound information about its activities. I soon discovered that the external stakeholders weren't the only ones being kept in the dark. The more I spoke to employees the more I heard about information silos, waste and poor decision making.

⁵⁹ Not its real name

Six weeks down the track I see little difference between the work I did at Beachlands and Forrester during my research project and the work I am now undertaking at Dust Cloud Unlimited. When I considered the standards for my research I purposefully overlooked transferability. It's understandable that I should given its cosy relationship to quantitative research. With my new experience under my belt and the challenge before me I would like to claim that my research can be transferable under the conditions described by Greenwood and Levin (2008, p. 74) that I am engaged in an active process of reflection in which (I) must make up (my) mind whether the previous knowledge makes sense in the new context or not and begin working on ways of acting in the new context".

I have begun to restructure the organisation using sociocratic principles. My first task was to claim back Dust Cloud Unlimited's community forum. In the absence of clear guiding principles it had been sabotaged by interest groups in the community and its purpose was largely unclear. After the first revisioned meeting I was confronted by a participant who yelled at me that "this isn't a meeting! I'm a businessman and this isn't a meeting!" There is much work to be done. Perhaps the first task could be the reintroduction of the "forgotten option of restraint" (Toms, 2002, p. 8). The restructuring and reculturing of the organisation must include the broader community of stakeholders if it is to be successful. At present the external stakeholders are either embittered and angry or silent. I see it as my challenge to provide a space where those voices are empowered to become "well informed citizenry" (Gore, 2007, p. 215). In doing so I can engage in critical self-reflection "determined by the infinite interest in the success of one's own life-project" (Habermas, 2003).

Forrester Primary School

I had no sooner sat down in my new office at Dust Cloud Unlimited when my iphone beeped an urgent message at me. I was still at the stage of wondering what it was I'd been hired to do so any diversion was welcome. It would keep me busy and make it look like I had things under control. The message was an urgent request from David, "Paula, please call." Something had come up and he needed fresh eyes to look at it. Was I available to meet at the school on Saturday?

I wasn't quite sure what to expect when I turned up but it was important – the entire Leadership Team was assembled and David, quite out of character, held the floor for the next hour. He described a three year process that the school had undertaken to investigate the value and logistics of introducing laptops into two classes in 2011. At the point of finalising all the details the parents had rebelled in a sudden offensive that took David quite by surprise. He couldn't understand where the attack had come from. The process had been rigorous. He'd engaged outside consultants, the teachers had been hand-picked for the classes, and they had gone out and investigated what other schools had done. David had kept the community informed all the way through the process and the Strategic Planning Action Group (SPAG), that included parent representatives, had been involved in the decision making. So what had gone wrong?

I spent the next two hours working through the issues with the Leadership Team. I brought a different lens to the problem and explored their perceptions using questioning. We poured over letters that had been written to the education sector governing body. They were full of emotion and anger. Why weren't they told? But they had been told! I suggested that perhaps the messages had been too general and that people hadn't connected personally to them. I couldn't help being reminded about Forrester teacher, John's, earlier reference in Chapter 9 to the struggle the Leadership Team had been through in introducing sociocratic governance. What were his words again?

I still feel there's a lot of work to be done in making sure other staff are aware of the struggles - it will be great once this is all done, if it's opened up to other people to have a read because I'm curious as to what people on the outside think; teacher assistant or the teacher that may not have got as actively engaged. Do they think we were just sitting here having a wonderful time playing with their minds, or do they actually think that there was process we were going through and to appreciate that in that process there was lots of evolution, lots of change, lots of us we have to make it so human (p. 218).

John saw the value of revealing the struggle to his peers and other stakeholders. He didn't want them thinking he'd just been for a stroll in the park. But here he was embroiled in an almost identical dilemma. He and his fellow leaders had grappled

with the process of introducing laptops into the school but they had done so largely behind closed doors. Now they were in that position again of wanting the parents to know how hard they'd worked at coming up with the final decisions. The parent feedback indicated that they didn't care for the rigour of the process - that was beside the point. What enraged them was they had never been *asked*. No one had thought to ask them how they felt or what they feared. I suggested inviting the parents into the school to talk about what was on their minds.

The following week I facilitated a meeting with the parents. The Leadership Team was fearful about fronting up to a public meeting but I established the rules of engagement and the discussion proceeded. Parents expressed concern largely grounded in misinformation or hearsay. Many of the questions raised issues about bigger things that the school will need to address at a later stage. For example, consider the parent who asked how reading and writing would fit into the curriculum if kids were on computers all day. How will my child be assessed? What if my child leaves his computer at home by mistake, which he will! The meeting began with a sense of angst in the room and by the time the last comment was made and the last question asked order had been restored and the parents reported feeling more comfortable with the decisions. David followed up the meeting with a written response to the questions asked and, after sending it through to me to look over, sent it to all the affected parents. The program will go ahead, the parents, for now, mollified.

After the meeting the Leadership Team gathered in the staff room for a collective sigh of relief. David called everyone to attention.

I think we've survived this one but it impacts hugely on another decision we've made, Travis, I don't think we can go ahead with the concept of a middle school next year. We're going to need to do some more work with the community before we go there.

John rolled his eyes and shook his head,

Yeah, I understand but we're just not prepared for this work. We're teachers; we don't have the skills to do engagement.

I suggested a way to start might be to solve their problems publicly- to be transparent about the fact that we rarely have all the solutions and that community participation is about learning together on the job. I suggested also that we take a leaf out of social commentator Hugh McKay's book and create distinctions between data transfer and communication (2009) and begin to talk to the people whose lives our decisions impact on.

Conclusion 2

When Senge et al. (2000) discuss the essential elements for school renewal; parent empowerment is top of the list. John may claim that engaging his community is not part of his core business, or a skill set that he possesses, but here he is carrying the burden anyway - just as Habermas said he would (in Wills & Cardin, 2004).

Beachlands, Forrester and Dust Cloud Unlimited share many traits in common. A society that is increasingly adept at having their voices heard by fair means or foul is quite possibly the most critical trait they share today. In the absence of an invitation to participate in making decisions that impacts on their lives, we can see agents begin to exercise their right to have a say. We see them begin to act in ways that lead not to purposeful dialogue and deliberative action that serves all community members, but as outraged individuals pursuing their own self interest (Gould, 1998). Whatever organisations think about their stakeholders, one thing is for certain, the participation society is just warming up and schools would do well to make community engagement more than a defacto plan and begin "reaching out and engaging in a way that is productive and generous" (Toms, 2002, p. 104).

Paula Joyce, Perth, WA, December, 2010

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Appendix A

Sociocracy – the science of dynamic self-governance

Sociocracy is a sustainable, organisational management process that directs its energy towards realising the organisation's highest potential. It is modelled on systems thinking and reflects a belief in complexity science which recognises adaptation under pressure.

The First Governing Principle – Consent

Consent governs decision-making. Consent means there are no argued and paramount objections to a proposed policy decision

The Second Govern Principle – The Circle

A circle is a semi-autonomous and self-organising unit that has its own aim. It makes policy decisions within its domain; delegates the leading, doing and measuring functions to its own members; maintains its own memory system; and plans its own development.

The Third governing Principle – The Double Link

The connection between two circles is a double-link formed by the operational leader and one or more representatives who participate fully in the decision-making of the next higher circle.

The Forth Governing Principle – The Open Election

Circles elect people to functions and tasks by consent after open discussion.

Guide to Circle Meetings

Meeting Format

1. *Opening Round* – time to attune to each other and attune to the aims of the circle. Share what is uppermost in your mind right now.
2. *Administrative Concerns* – items that need little or no discussion, clarification or decisions. Announcements, consent to minutes, dates, acceptance of agenda.
3. *Content* – agenda items
4. *Closing Round* – Includes measurement and evaluation of the meeting and its results, and future agenda items.

Circle members and Functions

Every member of the circle has a day-to-day “doing” function. In addition, some members have other roles in circle meetings. These functions are:

1. **Operational Leader:** Supervises the circle’s daily work and participates in the next highest circle
2. **Facilitator:** Leads circle meetings. May or may not be the operational leader of the circle
3. **Secretary:** The circle administrator. Takes and publishes meeting minutes, announces and makes arrangements for meetings, collects items for the meeting agenda from other circle members, prepares handout materials, and prepares the agenda in consultation with the facilitator.
4. **Logbook Keeper:** Liaises with secretary to obtain and distribute log book materials and maintains master logbook.
5. **Elected Representative(s):** Represents the circle in the next highest circle

Role Descriptions and Attributes

The Operational Leader has autocratic authority over daily operational decisions and task assignment. He or she may call staff meetings as needed and normally conducts the business of those meeting in the traditional autocratic manner. The circle may elect the OL to serve as circle meeting facilitator, secretary or logbook keeper but *not* to serve as a representative.

The Circle Meeting Facilitator is responsible for leading meetings and is elected by the circle. The facilitator stands for the process of the meeting and should be someone who is adept at steering discussions, moving decisions forward, and keeping everyone focussed on the aim of the meeting and the aim of the circle. The facilitator’s job is to produce decisions with no objections.

Each Participant’s Job is to speak the truth as they know it to be at that time, to give others your silent attention when it is their turn to speak, respectfully assist other participants to speak the truth, participate in problem-solving, and improve proposals in order to accommodate objections.

The Secretary: In addition to the above functions the secretary also confirms attendance of key people or invited guests and prepares the meeting room.

Elected Representative(s) carry information and power ‘up’ the organisation while the OR carries the power ‘down’. This double linking ensures the circular process elements of **leading and measuring** are preserved between circles.

The Log Book

A logbook is maintained by all circle representatives. It includes:

- A statement of the organisations vision, mission and core values
- The aim of the circle
- Strategic plans
- A diagram of the circle organisation
- Organisation and circle rules and procedures
- Meeting record;
- Names and roles of members
- Flowcharts summarising the leading, doing and measuring
- Circle's development plan

Consent Decision Making

Consent decision making is not the same as consensus, despite sharing the same etymological root. Consensus means reaching broad agreement. Consent means to give formal permission for something to happen. With consent, the object is not agreement; the objective is no **reasoned and paramount objection**. We are looking for common ground that fits within our level of tolerance.

The consent principle employs chaos to come to clarity on policy directions that people will accept in their particular circumstances, but it makes it possible to resist sometimes sudden and arbitrary actions by power holders and systemic coercion by majority parties or other voting blocks.

Clarifying the Purpose of the Closing Round

As humans, we evaluate intuitively. We look outside in the morning and check what the weather will be to determine our actions (will I go for a walk in the rain this morning or stay tucked up in bed); our choice of breakfast (damn, there's no milk left!); our route to work (avoid the freeway north this morning, there's a three car pileup closing all lanes).

As community members, we evaluate our sporting events during and after the game; in fact, there are entire television programs devoted to evaluating football

games. We belong to book clubs that evaluate other people's writing. We intuitively have an opinion about the many events that make up our lives.

As teachers, we evaluate as part of best practice. We make judgements throughout the day that inform our teaching choices, we gather data from our evaluations to help differentiate our curriculum. We evaluate to improve our planning and to inform stakeholders of our client's progress. We set up our lessons with a beginning (opening round), a middle (the business of the meeting), and a plenary (the closing round).

As a community of educators, the closing round in a meeting calls us to evaluate the complex work we do together as members of a professional organisation. In the closing round we can provide feedback to our peers, voice our emerging thinking and contribute to the growing wisdom of the group. The closing round is an opportunity to put our work in a place of importance that is at least equal to a football match.

"In the prayer preceding the meeting this week, we were moved by the image of one person's ability to make a difference. The opening round, therefore, is also an opportunity for us to make real the message of the video and give each other a 'blue ribbon' in appreciation for the work we do together."

Emerging Possibilities of the Closing Round

Rather than addressing your comments to the group, consider placing your comments (metaphorically) in a vessel that resides inside the circle. You could see it as a big copper pot, or you may have a different image, where all our comments are carefully placed; to be considered further, to rub up against each other and perhaps evolve into new thinking.

Strong evaluative comments help us do our work better. They may look something like this:

"Finally the penny dropped! I learnt more in this session than I have over the last 7 years."

"Maryanne is doing such a fantastic job of the meetings. They start on time, we're fully engaged and the time flies by! A blue ribbon to everyone who is helping to make this happen."

"I'm overwhelmed by the information and need time to digest it. I may have some more questions to ask throughout the week to help me make sense of it."

"I'm not sure how this format fits with my subject area yet. I'd like to give it a try and see."

The Closing Round provides us with essential data to improve the work that we do together.

Inspiration

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

*Our deepest fear
is that we are powerful beyond measure.*

*It is our light, not our darkness,
that most frightens us.*

*We ask ourselves, who am I
to be brilliant, gorgeous,
talented and fabulous?*

*Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.*

*Your playing small doesn't serve the world.
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.*

*We were born to make manifest
the glory of God that is within us.
It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.
And as we let our own light shine,
we unconsciously give other people
permission to do the same.*

*As we are liberated from our own fear,
our presence automatically liberates others.*

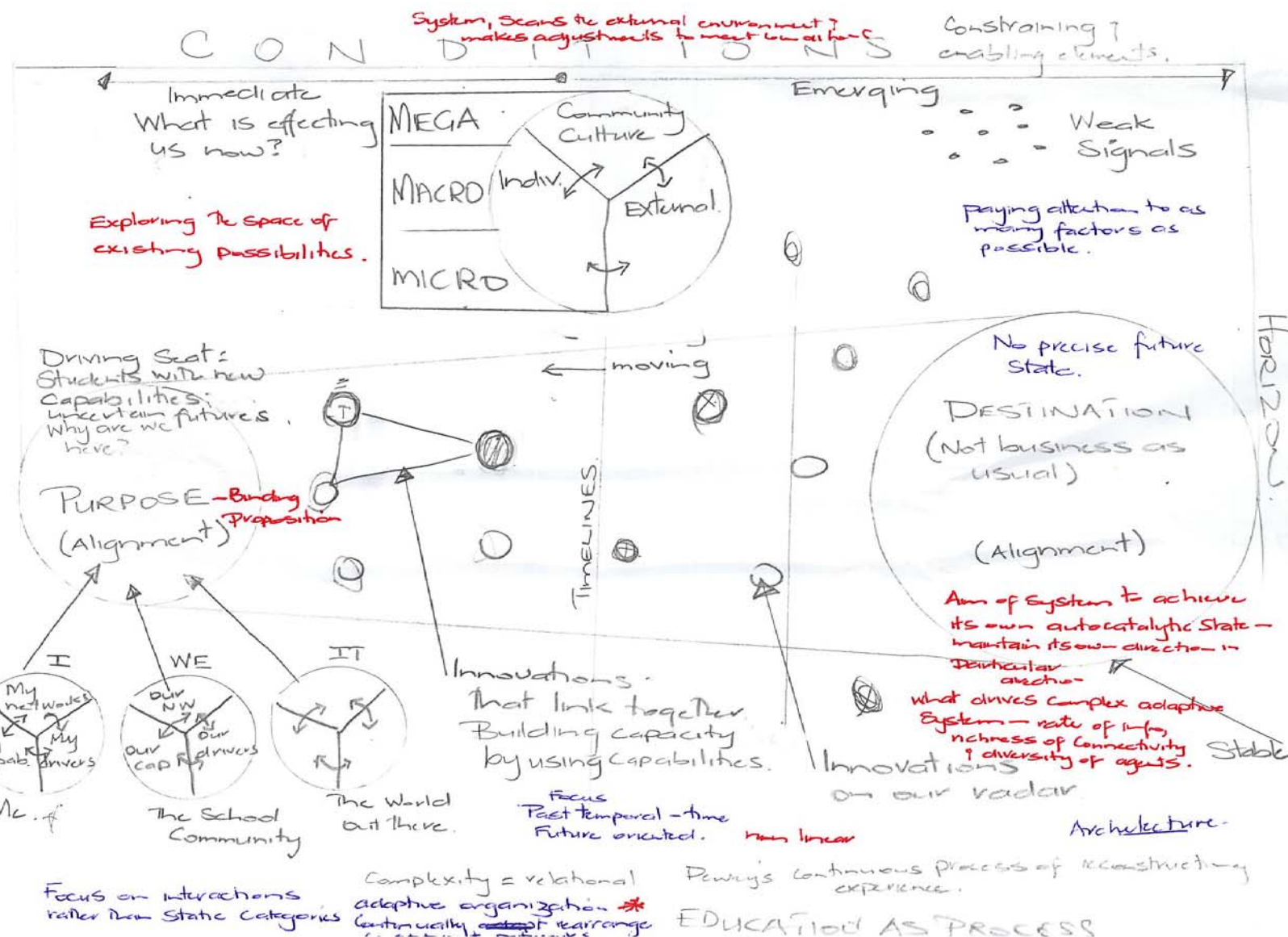
Written by Marianne Williamson- an
excerpt from her book, "A Return to Love"

Sociocratic governance asks you to let your light shine and gives permission for others to do the same within the agreed values of your organisation.

Appendix B: Scribbles on the back of a napkin

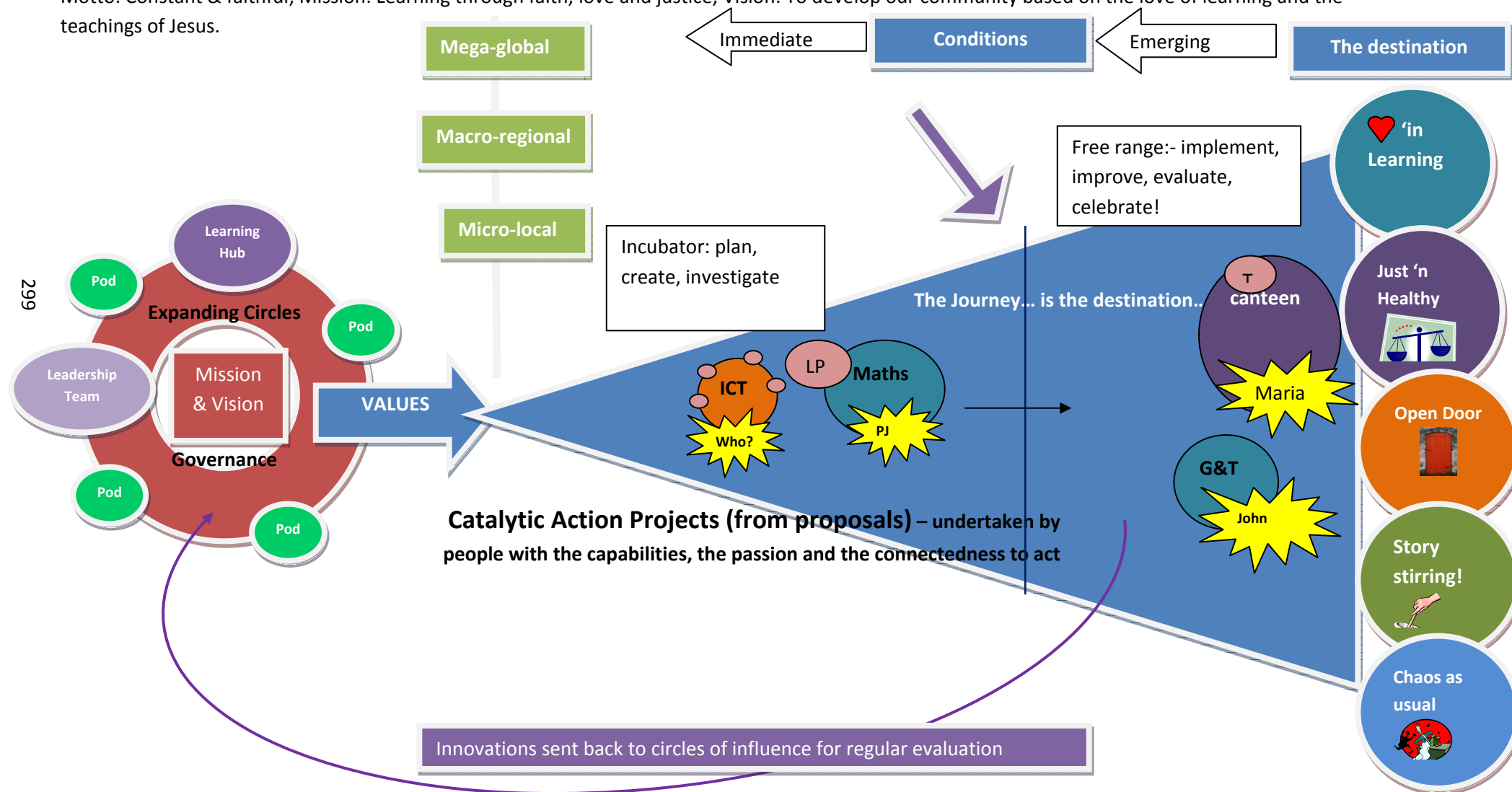
298

SOCIOCRATIC GOVERNANCE = Information flow, accountability, dialogue, leadership, shared understanding



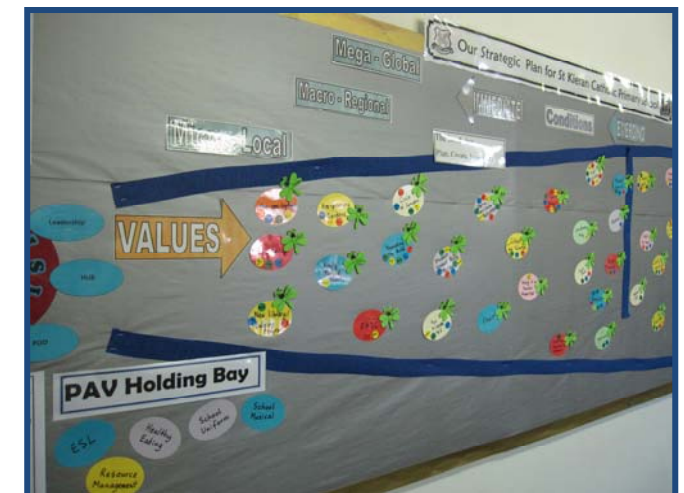
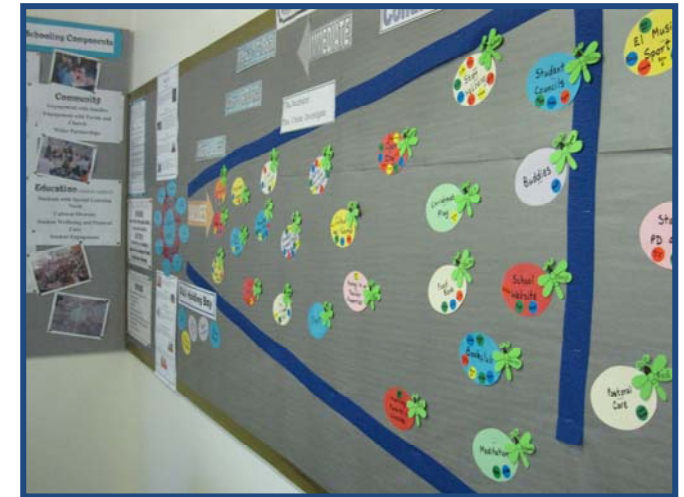
Appendix C: Forrester Primary School – Organisational Map

Motto: Constant & faithful; Mission: Learning through faith, love and justice; Vision: To develop our community based on the love of learning and the teachings of Jesus.



Appendix D: Images of the Organisational Map taken at Forrester Primary School, August, 2010.

Sue is the custodian of the Organisational Map at Forrester. Her work entails keeping the map up-to-date as the system continues to improve. She ensures that activities undertaken are linked back to the school's expressed values and to system requirements, and forward to the desired destinations. Sue keeps everyone informed about how they are doing in keeping the organisation aligned.



Appendix E: How organisational mapping was developed at Forrester primary School

Step 1

At Forrester we began constructing the organisational map by identifying all the work that was already being done in the school and by whom. This was the work that was determined in the meeting structure and undertaken by the circles of influence. We discovered many things as we worked together and, as the group struggled to identify who had responsibility for each



activity, I introduced the notion of custodians and champions. It seemed that nominating groups, such as *the Leadership Team*, or *all teachers*, to the role of custodian did not ensure that the work would get done, or in some cases even get off the ground. Without one clear person assigned to look after a task they tended to fall off the radar when inevitably other things came along to take their place. So new initiatives, such as Quality Catholic Schooling was destined to *take the place* of RAISE rather than being recognised as a complementary initiative. PATHS, (Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies) might happily ‘knock the socks’ off the Rock and Water program - designed to build resilient boys - if we weren’t careful simply because there isn’t time to do everything.

We used ‘sponge bugs’ to identify the custodians and coloured dots to identify the champions of each activity. On the oval circles wrote the work that was already being done in school - the colours of the ovals linked to the destination that the stakeholders defined at Step 1. But before we go there let’s take a look at step 2.



we
the
3.

Step 2

At this point the group brainstormed all the conditions they could think of that impacted on the work they did in school and classified them into levels that reflected the range from global to local. They identified those that were already impacting (like benchmark testing and the My Schools website where school performance was published) and determined what immediate effect they were having. Whilst acknowledging that conditions are constantly

changing- some emerging and some fading away, their impact on a school on any one day they might look like the ones listed below that were identified at Forrester.

Conditions – impacts & influences – opportunity or threat?	
	<div>← Immediate</div> <div>← Emerging</div>
Mega- at the Global level	food shortage; cost of oil or petrol; climate change; social change; knowledge of economy; economy; redundant knowledge; future change; medicine science; travel and the global village; political G20; economy finance; secular world; terrorist mentality; political power shift; media-powerful, accessible and influential; rapid change in technology; general theory; Obama drama; brain research; global change in power drivers; aging population
Macro- at the system level	WACOT and WWC; entry/exit age; early years framework; quality catholic school; building education revolution; CEO budget; re-units of work; Australian Curriculum; curriculum framework; anxiety; Julia compliance; EBA; bishops mandate; national testing; OHS; SES/funding; children's services act; government policy; collaboration by coercion; education act; national partnerships; local government; family units; disabilities discrimination act; work cover; government change; someone will fix it; compliance fear; power struggle; change is the only certainty;
Micro- at the local level	don't like people in the classroom; demographics; time accounting; Father Bob; business as usual; locality and resources; blurred lines of responsibility – parents/school/home; frustration; won't get it right-“still need to get it right; big dynamic change; core skills by generic industry fields; website; parents(responsibility); different messages between ‘them’; different pages damage pods; looking for quick fixes and doing stuff; pd; car park gossip; government system not encouraging quality conversations; trust essential also for parent; lack of trust of organizational tension; daylight saving; difference within catholic doctrine; distribution of workload; removal of learning to a hands off approach; NAPLAN; teach to the test pressure to complete; network untapped; change is the only certainty –short contract-competitiveness.

In traditional organisations, conditions shadow the activities undertaken each day but they are rarely invited to join the discussion. In Expanding Circles meetings they become the focus of school improvement; conditions are identified and tackled head-on as a way of recognising what pressures might be brought to bear on a school and how it can respond as a resilient learning organisation.

Step 3

At this point it is time to define that illusive destination. In Expanding Circles organisations there is no precise destination but rather a desired state of being that adapts and achieves its own autocatalytic state. Participants first determined what that state might be by brainstorming all possible outcomes for schooling that they felt were desirable for a 21st century child. We categorise the outcomes into areas that, at Forrester, seemed to naturally fall into such areas as Curriculum, Community and Faith.

Inevitably participants use commonplace terms to describe the desired destinations – terms such as “life-long learner” and “ethical thinker” terms that have often been accepted into general parlance without discussion about what they really mean. We accept common understandings that often lead to mis-understandings so at this point participants engage in dialogue about meanings and come up with their own unique language to describe what they mean. You can see an example of Forrester’s unique language below.

Our Destination: As identified at Forrester Primary today



More explicit and targeted teaching, points of growth, reinvented, new pd targeted , uncrack the existing, critical thinkers , creative, productive, innovate , active participants, lifelong learning for all, accountability and evidence , measure of teacher and student



Social justice, ethical thinker, appreciates difference, importance of Forrester’s witness, health structured at all levels to empower, value and honour experiences and diversity.



Technology use and teaching, work with community, parent education on work of teacher.



Connectivism, teaching and carrying hope, story and conversation, transfer skills



Management and communication, leader's courage,
leadership models, trust and values

The colour and images are important features on the Organisational Map as they help the custodian keep track of all activities and ensure that the organisation is developing and growing holistically. If you look at Forrester's map (Appendix C) you'll notice that the individual activity colours match the destination colours as a visual signal to the organisation of what they are working on at any one time. If purple is missing it is a signal to the organisation that they are forgetting the importance of working on their cultural health, if orange is missing the vital ingredient of communicating with the schools stakeholders might have been overlooked. In the coda to this thesis you will see the recent impact that forgetting orange had at Forrester.

In Appendix D you'll notice that the organisational map at Forrester has undergone a considerable transformation over time since that first foray into mapping the work going on in the school.

Appendix F

Facilitating Change in Your School

*A Handbook for Creating the
Conditions for Sustainable
Organisational Learning*

Introduction

Over the years, many hours of thinking and planning have gone into trying to turn schools in to learning organisations. Despite the fact that everyone agrees peer learning is essential for schools to improve, actually making it happen remains largely unattained. You may be one of those people responsible for planning professional learning for and with your peers and have felt the frustration and challenge of preparing each week for a meeting that doesn't quite achieve the goals you envision.

As a leader of change in your organisation you may be asked to undertake work that you have not been prepared for and in doing so come face-to-face with resistance to change, on the one hand, and the excitement of engagement on the other that asks you to skilfully balance and grow the best learning organisation. Facilitating change is not the same as running a meeting. The role requires you to undertake very different kind of work and, as an **insider** in an organisation, it raises all kinds of questions about the capacity of each individual to embrace and support peer leadership. The conditions for success are many and require deep thinking, first and foremost, about how to prepare yourself and your community for an educational journey in an environment of openness and trust. It won't happen overnight and, as a facilitator your role becomes one of reading the conditions that might impact on the success of your community's work and finding ways to respond that create positive conditions for success.

Facilitating Change in Your School is one element of Expanding Circles Organisations and fits within the **Strategic Planning at the Speed of Change**, framework for adaptable organisations. This manual will provide you with a way of getting started on this complex journey of **sustainable improvement** in your school. It is arranged into 5 interlinking modules that are supported by a workbook. Each module is a discrete unit of learning but to get the best out of the whole program Modules 1 & 2 must be completed first.

Module 1: Awakening the Facilitator Within

Module 2: Preparing your Organisation to Learn

Module 3: Planning for Sustainable Organisational Learning

Module 4: Communication for Sustainable Organisational Learning

Using the Manual & Workbook



The pencil symbol tells you when to turn to the workbook.

*Words that appear in the text like this, **resilient**, tells you that the use of the term, in the context of this manual, is listed in the glossary on page 4.*



This symbol indicates it's time to share your thoughts.



This is where we have a conversation with the whole group.

*Words written like this; **Turn to Your Partner** indicates that they are strategies and will be explored in greater detail in Module 5.*



When you see this symbol it's time for thinking and reflecting.

Module 5: Processes and Strategies for Sustainable Organisational Learning

Facilitating change in Your School requires a context for learning; therefore, real case studies are used to assist you in understanding the various ways that you can take to create a learning organisation. There is no one way to achieve a *dynamic*, sustainable learning organisation but you are encouraged to begin the journey in Module 1 with the first courageous step into your shared future.

About the Author, Paula Joyce

After a long career in education, spanning three decades, Paula left teaching several years ago and, quite by chance, became involved in facilitating private sector community engagement and public participation within a framework that has become known as New Public Governance. While many organisations are committed to encouraging greater involvement of stakeholders, schools remain largely tied to top-down management models despite the rhetoric of collaboration and the call for leadership at every level.

Paula is interested in developing systems of sustainable improvement in schools, where leadership at every level is lived rather than simply talked about. She has been challenged by the theories of *complexity science, network theory and Integralism* to provide a space where emergence is valued as a natural occurrence of a dynamic and ever-changing organisation. Paula is currently a PhD candidate at Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia.

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Glossary

insider	This refers to someone who belongs to a group from inside an organisation.
Strategic Planning at the Speed of Change	Is a process tool to track and monitor changes in the organisation over time. It creates a current picture of the entire organisation as it adapts and remains resilient to conditions at scale.
dynamic	The organisation has a sense of purpose that is action oriented. It knows how to get started and how to keep things going
sustainable improvement	The buzz word of the decade, sustainable, in this context, means that improvement is planned for, invested in and monitored over time. Sustainable improvement assumes rigorous decision-making to rid schools of the problems and economic waste associated with unsustainable improvement; fragmented, single issue responses to complex problems.
network theory	Looks at the interconnected lives of people in organisations and creates value around the knowledge that resides in them.
Integralism	Adapted from the work of Ken Wilber, Integralism looks at the parts of an organisation in relation to a coherent and interrelated whole.
complexity theory	Recognises that schools are not made up of fragmented parts but each element is interrelated and connected in multiple ways. Complexity theory calls on us to be vigilant for emergence that can provide threats or opportunities.
theory of practice	An awareness of the science that drives what you do and why you do it.
Leadership at Every Level	Embraces that notion that we are all leaders of our own learning and can empower others to lead. Leadership at every level does not endow some people in an organisation with power over others. LaEL considers everyone as equal participants in creating a learning organisation.

Module 1: Awakening the Facilitator Within

In this module you will:

- Develop your own definition of facilitator and define the work that you will do
- Recognise your capabilities in line with the role of facilitator
- Explore the attributes and skills of an effective facilitator
- Understand the personally protective nature of facilitation processes
- Create a plan for ongoing learning about facilitation
- Use reflective practice and dialogue to expand and deepen your understanding of yourself and others.

What is a facilitator and what does a facilitator do?



Before we begin exploring the role of a facilitator let's begin with what you already know. **Turn to page 1, Exercise 1,** in your Workbook and answer the questions for yourself before we get into the discussion.



The term *facilitator* first entered my consciousness during a time of change in education, around 1996. During that time a framework was mandated for use in all schools in the state, replacing the curriculum that had been in existence for many years. The Curriculum Framework document used very different language to describe the work a teacher did and, as teachers, we were challenged to become facilitators rather than expert transmitters of learning. I was told, on many occasions, that I was now *a guide on the side not a sage on the stage*. I never did get to figure out what that meant until I undertook a facilitator's course, 10 years down the track. Suddenly my eyes were opened to the amazing possibilities contained in exploring that role when I became aware of the specific skills and processes facilitators use to guide and engage learners. While I believed I had the capacity and capabilities to facilitate learning with my students I did not have the same degree of skill when it came to

guiding learning with my peers. As the curriculum coordinator my job was to lead professional learning and, as I have heard so often from other teachers in a similar position to me, each week I went into meetings feeling like I had to herd the mob in a direction that many were unwilling to take. I now realise how completely unprepared I had been as I was largely unaware of the many ways that I could have gone about creating an environment that supported professional learning.

Can we define what a facilitator is and can do? Take a look at the following definitions and take note of what they have in common. Throughout this module you will have the opportunity to develop a personal definition of facilitator that best describes the work you do.

Used to embrace all

A trained specialist; influential in making decisions about how a meeting is run; proposes, suggests, invites and consults; concerned that everyone feels included and accepted

A way of providing leadership without taking the reins; enable others to assume responsibility and take the lead

One who contributes structure and process; a helper and enabler whose goal is to support others as they achieve exceptional performance

someone who makes progress easier; someone who helps a group of people understand their common objectives and assists them to plan to achieve them without taking a particular position in the discussion



Let's Talk!

Turn to Your Partner (TTYD) and discuss what you noticed about the definitions. Turn back to the definition you wrote in your workbook and tell each other if there is anything that you would change about your definition at this stage. Write over your definition if you need to; cross out or add in. This is a work in progress.

When you begin to investigate what it is to be a facilitator it becomes clear that there are aspects of the role that people agree are vital and other aspects that are more difficult to agree on. Some facilitators like to take an active role in the proceedings of the group, while others prefer to take a back seat and be almost invisible in the process. This is how one facilitator describes himself:

My natural leadership style is closer to *laissez-faire* than anything else. Yours may not be. There are some occasions which justify reaching for a piece of psychological 4" X 2."

(Dick, 1991, p. 2)

While another says;

The ultimate facilitator will do nothing and remain totally invisible.

(Owen, 2008, p. 63)

Initially, the kind of facilitator you are will most likely be determined by your personality. As a facilitator you are called on to challenge your accepted ways of being and doing and become the best facilitator of learning that you can. For now, let's consider that remaining totally invisible and doing nothing is an aspect of the ultimate facilitator, so too might using a piece of psychological 4" x 2."

In my own practice, I find that groups feel effective when the purpose of a meeting is clearly identified and they are clear on the scope of a task. They feel fulfilled when each individual has been heard and valued and when dialogue leads to a commitment to action. Therefore, in my role as facilitator, I strive to make the process transparent and easy for all participants so that dialogue to action can happen. Sometimes that's a challenge when I see things one way while the group, or individuals in the group, see it another and I'm forced to delve into my repertoire of skills and strategies to bring the group back into alignment.

More than anything, the role of facilitator challenges my relationships with others, my deeply held fears, my level of trust in myself and others, my belief in my capacity to listen deeply and hear the messages embedded in the words; not just the words themselves. Doing the work of the facilitator forces me to ask questions about who am I and who are these people who I am engaged with. I ask the question, what do we all need to be the best we can be.

The word *facilitator* comes from the French word, *facile*; easy. As a facilitator, your role is to make things easy for your peers; processes, agreements, decision-making or any other event that you are engaged in together. You're probably beginning to realise that being a facilitator is anything but easy, and even the best description of the work a facilitator does is slippery and uncertain. It calls on you to develop your own understanding of the role; to be self-aware and reflective, have the capacity to live with ambiguity and have a strong belief that, when things get tough, the wisdom and goodness of the group will eventually prevail.

Capabilities – what do I bring to the role of facilitator?



Think about your own capabilities and attributes. What do you think you already bring to the role of facilitator? Write your responses in your workbook; **Page 1, Exercise 2.**

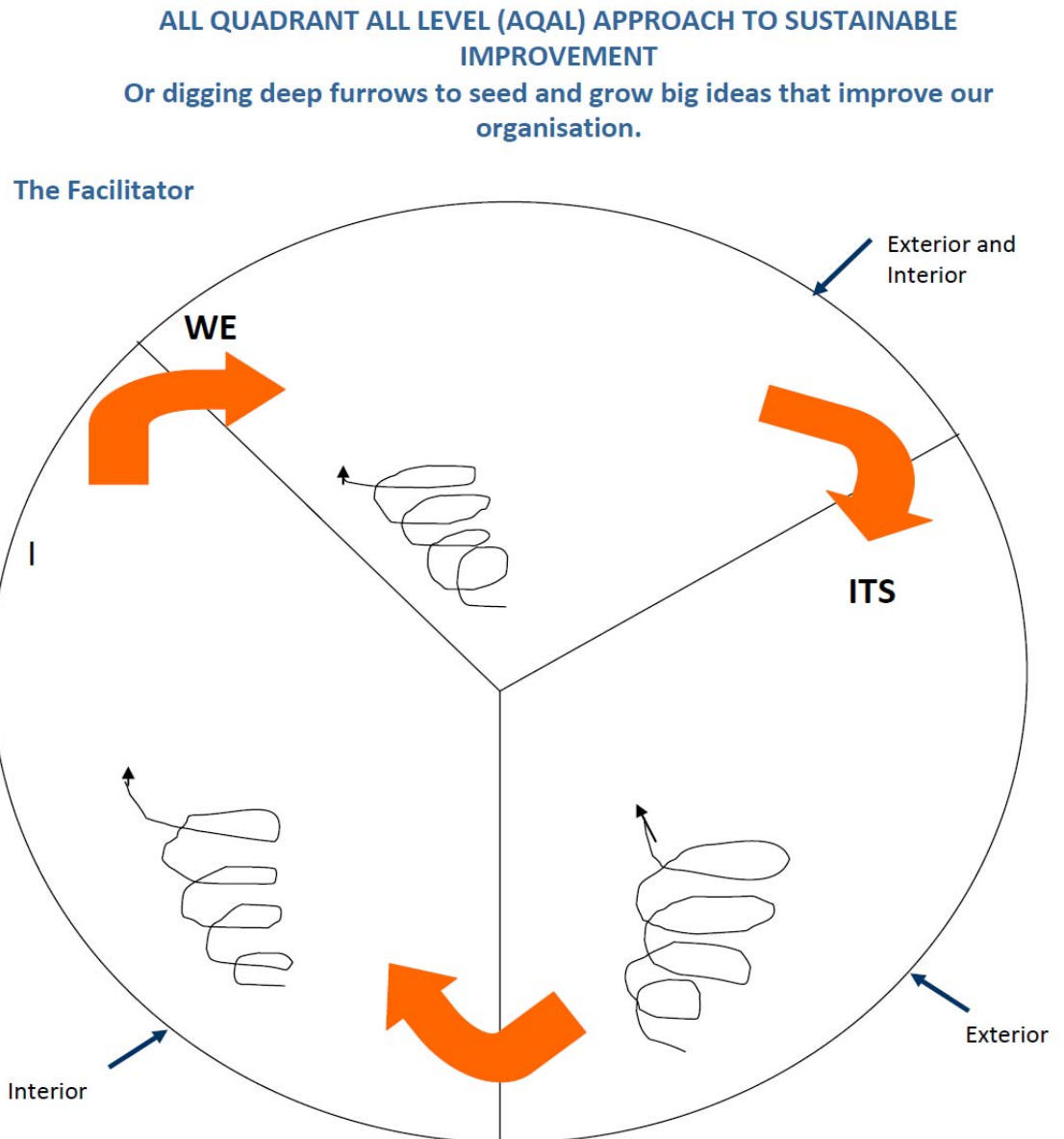
We're now going to spend some time looking at the capabilities and attributes of a facilitator and use this knowledge to refine your definition of what a facilitator is and does. But first I want to introduce an *Integral Framework* as a way of identifying your areas of strength and opportunities for further growth.

I use a very simplified *Integral Framework* to help me understand many different situations, from collating information after a brainstorming session, to reflecting on my own strengths and areas of growth potential. Use the framework with your peers to help them see what kind of work you are doing in a meeting. For example, by working together on the Information Technology policy, you can show that they are also expressing individual beliefs and values (I) and determining what kind of culture you are developing around the use of technologies (WE).

In the haste to get things done, a school often focuses most of its energy on getting the externals right, in this case the hardware and network requirements (ITS), and forget to pay due attention to the other two quadrants. Without clearly defining the capabilities of the "I" who teaches and the "WE" that hold each other accountable within the cultural agreements that we have made, the potential of technologies remain unexplored and in many cases fail to live up to the expectations invested in them.

Integral Framework

The Integral Framework below can provide you with a visual map of your personal facilitator territory and you can add to it as your learning grows. If we look at the model below we can already begin to populate the segments with what we already know.



The “I” segment is about the person who comes in the facilitating space. For example, your beliefs and values, your knowledge and understanding and your self-efficacy, and whatever else you think you bring as an individual.

The “WE” segment is about how you perceive and interact with others, the environment you work in and the culture of the group and the attributes and values you have as a collective. We’ll be going into this in greater detail in Module 2.

The “ITS” segment is about the tools you have in your facilitator toolkit and the skills and strategies you have developed to assist you in your role as facilitator. This manual and workbook are in my ITS segment.

The spiral I’ve drawn in each sector recognises that we all have the capability and potential to improve and grow in what we do and that we should aspire to develop greater awareness and consciousness about our role as facilitator and how we do it.



Turn to your workbook, **Exercise 3, p.2** and begin to fill in the Integral Framework. We’ll keep returning to this throughout the course to build up a more complete picture of “I,” the facilitator, “WE,” all of the people in your organisation, and “ITS” the tangible aspects of facilitating that you, and your whole organisation, are developing together.

When I think about the capabilities and attributes I need to bring to the group, as facilitator, I’m constantly faced with the dilemma of my own learning style. As a thinker and learner I need to have a global picture of the world and where my work fits into it, but I also see the minute particles that make up each situation and project, in fine detail. My picture has links and connections keeping everything related one thing to the other but there is no particular order to my facilitation map. I see every point as a starting point and every fine detail just as important as another in facilitating group learning. Writing this manual is a huge challenge to me, therefore, because I want to begin everywhere! One of the attributes I need to bring to the facilitating space, therefore, is an acknowledgement and understanding of different learning styles and the need for some learners to have the big picture, while others might need a linear process and, yet others, might need more time to think and others more time to talk.



Think about – what kind of learner are you? How do you like to learn? What are the optimal conditions for you as a learner?



Share your observations with your group.



Now go somewhere quiet and write a reflection on how your learning style might impact on the way you work with a group. Then write a wish list of capabilities and attributes you would like to aspire to as a facilitator (**Exercise 4, p.2-3** in your workbook).

My incomplete and ever-evolving wish list looks something like this;

- Stop and think more and talk less
- Become better at listening for desires and dreams in messages
- Trust in the capacity of other learners to do their own thinking
- Value silence
- Be adaptable
- Communicate more often and more effectively with the primary decision-maker
- Clarify my understanding of what is happening
- Live with complexity
- Be alert for emerging conditions

The Questioning Facilitator

Now let's look at some specific capabilities that will help you in the work you do as a facilitator. The first is the ability to **question deeply**; to listen for underlying desires and yearnings and to help individuals and groups find common ground. You'll find some examples of questions in **Appendix 1** at the back of this manual. Through questioning you can assist diverse groups to appreciate each other as you respond to the messages that are sometimes hidden in the words a person speaks. It takes time and practice to hear the essence of messages and make an appropriate response so make a plan to begin using one at a time until they become part of you and your facilitating repertoire.

An interesting note to make at this point is that you are more than likely using great questioning techniques with your students as part of your teaching repertoire. As teachers, we know how effective and important questioning is and yet, when collaborating with our peers, we forget to use the tools we already have to create a learning organisation. For some reason we find using and sharing best practice easier if the focus is off ourselves and on our students. What you know is great pedagogy in your classroom doesn't stop being great when a learner ages. Use what you already know works!

Case Study

The Case of the Marvellous Maths Teacher

Background: A group of teachers were talking about how to improve the teaching and learning of maths in the school. They had discovered what was already happening in classrooms and today it was time to think about improvements to the current way they did things. One teacher shared the following story.

In maths, we've been doing weeks and weeks of concrete work and yesterday it was time to see if the kids could transfer their understanding of what we'd been doing into written...amazing how well most of them got it but some kids didn't..I was thinking if only I had better resources. I was so annoyed at myself...I'd only given the kids one way of doing something...if I'd spent more time ...presented it lots of different ways...good if we could share resources and strategies...planning other ways of doing things...dialogue between people...identifying critical parts of the curriculum...



Turn to your partner and discuss what you heard this teacher say? What is she yearning for? What are the underlying messages she is giving about herself and her work?

At the heart of good group learning and facilitating is the ability to draw out and reveal for the group the desires and yearnings that people express in their every day speech that we often let slip through the gaps and roll away. We often don't know what to do with a conversation like this because we share ideas without having a clear idea of their value for one another, and we live by the rule that we don't have time. In your meetings you might have experienced sharing ideas and practice with your peers, taking turns in a circle, without really understanding the thinking that lies behind every decision we make as teachers. Does it matter? When we take the time to listen and question we can find common ground that connects us to each other in our agreements rather than our disagreements and, in doing so, we can work together improve the work we do.

In the case study above, the teacher described what happened in her class during maths time that gave us some insight into her work; a not uncommon example of the kind of sharing that goes on between peers in schools. If we take this example deeper, however, a different kind of collegial learning can occur. Listening with my facilitator's ears I hear the teacher expressing her beliefs about teaching and learning; the need to provide students with multiple ways of learning, the need to be well prepared to give students the best opportunity for transferring their knowledge. I hear the desire for dialogue and sharing the load with others and a need to clarify

what is critical knowledge in the curriculum. I hear self-reflection; identifying what went wrong for her and what she could do about it. I also heard disappointment. In fact, self-disappointment overshadowed the fact that *“most of the kids got it!”*

I hear her mention aspects of her practice in every quadrant of the Integral Model we used earlier.

“I” My beliefs about myself as a teacher- do I focus on the negative aspects of my work or see them as areas of growth potential? I desire connections with my peers, I believe that learners need multiple ways of achieving success, I believe in spending time in preparing well for my classes, I believe in the value of dialogue, I believing in differentiating the curriculum

“WE” As a groups we can be more effective, I want to dialogue with my peers, share resources and strategies, I want us to create a culture of collaboration

“IT” create better resources, identify the critical areas of the curriculum

As the facilitator I make a decision to focus on this teacher to help the group to learn beyond simply sharing ideas. I stop the group and say, “Let’s dig the gold out of this conversation and see what we can find that will help us understand better what our purpose is for sharing these ideas.”

I listen out for opportunities such as this so that I can challenge thinking and reach agreement on possible actions quicker and more effectively.

I say, “So what can you hear Val saying? What does she believe about teaching and learning? What is she saying she needs? Does anyone else share these beliefs, needs? What might this tell us about the improvements we need to make? Can anyone suggest a way forward with these ideas?”

I try to elicit responses out of the 3 Integral quadrants for a reason; most people like to focus on the “IT” sector because externals are often the easiest to deal with, they are tangible and doable. It’s your job, as facilitator, to help the group identify what they need, as individuals and as a group, at the internal level as well.

What you’re really revealing are the individual **theories of action** and the common culture of the group that will bring to life organisational values and aspirations in a practical context.

My turn: Let's look at a scenario now and see how this might work in a real situation. As you observe what is happening I want you to make some notes about what you see and hear, from the facilitator and the group. You'll find space in your workbook to jot down your musings (**Exercise 5, p.3**).



Your Turn: Working in a group of four you're now going to have time to practise facilitating your group using some questioning techniques. Each scenario is a suggestion only and, should you wish to do so, you're encouraged to substitute real-life examples of your own.



How did that feel? What did you discover about yourself? Did you find yourself thinking and listening in a different way as you facilitated the group? How about as a participant, what was it like for you? What did you notice about the way you contributed? Was there anything different about the way you participated to the way you usually would? What does this mean for you now?

No matter where I go to find information about creating learning organisations I find the same fundamental elements for success. Be it an article about corporate leadership or a presentation on teaching and learning, the importance of reflective practice is considered to be vital for the growth of the individual and the organisation. Do you agree with this view? I do, and yet when it comes to putting it into practice I find that I'm often all talk and no action. I think about things but too often I don't take the time to reflect deeply and write about my understandings. When I do, and later when I read back over what I have written, I'm constantly amazed at how much I've learnt since the time of writing and how much of the incident that I've forgotten.

When it comes to reflective practice it seems easier to hold two opposing views at the same time; an absolute belief in its value and an equally absolute belief that I don't have time for all that!



We're now going to go with the belief that reflective practice is vital for our learning using a strategy that I've called **H²BR** to reflect on the questions posed above. As with all the strategies in this manual they are generic and can go into your toolkit for you to use creatively where your imagination takes you. Turn to your workbook **Exercise 6, p.4 & 5** and complete the reflection.

Facilitating and Your Theory of Action

Whenever you collaborate with your peers and discuss issues of pedagogy you do so through the filter of beliefs that you have about teaching and learning. Your beliefs determine what you do and how you do it. They are the reason you choose one way of doing something over another or why you choose many ways rather than just one. When you did your teacher training you may have been asked to write a statement of your teaching philosophy that you took out on teaching practice with you. How has that influenced your work? Has it changed over time?

Remember, Val, the Marvellous Maths Teacher? She expressed elements of her Theory of Action when she described what was happening in her classroom. She told us she taught concepts first by using concrete materials then she gave the students opportunities to transfer their understanding into abstract representations. Val is driven to do things a particular way in her class because of beliefs that she has about teaching and learning.



What kinds of beliefs do you think Val has? Do you share some of her beliefs? What don't you know about Val that you would like to know to enable you to understand her Theory of Action better? Do you know of any theory that supports the way Val teaches?



Turn to your partner and discuss the questions above and begin to think about and share your own beliefs about teaching and learning.

What is it that makes you choose to do the things you do? Do you subscribe to any particular research or theory that you would like to share?



Now turn to your workbook **Exercise 7, p. 6** and jot down as many ideas about your Theory of Action as you can think of. This is a work in progress; don't try to make it perfectly coherent at this stage. Your Theory of Action should remain open to adaptation and improvement according to new ways of seeing and understanding the world and new learning about the work you do. In later Modules we'll be revisiting your Theory of Action and discover how it can become a focal point for peer discussion and accountability.



What did you notice/discover about yourself as you were doing that task? Did you discover anything surprising? Share this with the group.



Is there something you would now like to add to your Integral framework or your Facilitator Wish List? If so, add it now.



The notes for my Theory of Action might look something like this:

Teach slowly, carefully, in-depth, time to think, quality of thinking, student questioning, dialogue. No hands up-holding all students accountable to thinking, multiple ways of learning, complexity making connections with everything, collaborative learning, doing, achieving small targets towards bigger goals. Self-organising and self-directed learners. Problem solvers in everything, students making own plans of action. Everyone working on own innovative projects. Challenging to go beyond the known, listeners, social/critical constructivists, integral learners...

From those notes I'll write a statement that encapsulates my beliefs.

When I teach I don't really think about why I choose to do things in a particular way; it just feels right to me. But it isn't stagnant, I embrace new ways of teaching and learning that fit naturally with how I believe students learn best and that keeps me constantly on the look-out for improvement. When I talk to other teachers I refine and adapt my ideas from the conversations. My ideas can only grow and flourish when I dialogue with my peers and seek feedback about my thinking.

My Turn: I'd like you now to read the following statement and be prepared to take part in a *Samoan Circle* facilitated dialogue. The purpose of the dialogue is to observe and note how a dialogue is different from a discussion and to see what it's like to *make the process easy* when discussing what could be a contentious issue. You will have an opportunity to facilitate your own dialogue afterwards.

The ethos of the occupation (teaching) is tilted against engagement in pedagogical inquiry...Individualism leads to distrust of the concept of shared knowledge; it portrays teaching as the expression of individual personality...Teachers like to talk about "tricks of the trade" that they've picked up, not broader conceptions which underlie classroom practice.

(Lortie, cited in Wilson & Daviss, 1994, p. 88)



Turn to your workbook **Exercise 8, p. 6** and jot down some notes about what you observed the facilitator do to make the process easy. What was different about this kind of dialogue to the ones that you have with your peers, either in staff meetings or professional learning groups? What changes would you like to make about the way you facilitate peer learning at your school?

Your Turn: You will now have to opportunity to facilitate a Samoan Circle dialogue on your own with a small group. Some observers will be invited to give you feedback about what they saw you do and say using a focussed conversation strategy, *ORID*, that I also use for a variety of other purposes, including evaluation. Your peer review is in your workbook, **Exercise 9, p. 7**. You are also invited to use the ORID strategy to evaluate your own experience facilitating the Samoan Circle. Turn over the page for your issue.



When a doctor determines that a patient needs an appendectomy, then of course we'd want that doctor to know precisely how to do it. But if the doctor decided to take out the patient's appendix just because the patient has an abdominal pain, that troubles us. Typically, that's how schools work. If the kids aren't doing well in maths the solution is to look for a new textbook, a new technique, a new package. Too often schools never ask the right questions, find out what the problem is, ask what evidence there is, and choose the right response.

(Levin, cited in Wilson & Daviss, 1994, p. 173)



Let's share the experience of the whole group together. Has the discussion given you food for thought about your Theory of Action?

I'm going to invite you to speak your own truth and listen to what your peers have to say about their experiences. When you participate in dialogue you are asked to suspend judgement, to speak what is true for you and listen for the gold in what other people have to say. You do not have to change other people's minds or hearts, but be alert for the message that just might change yours.

Hats Off: Facilitating from the Inside

What is it like for you when you're trying to lead peer learning? Research shows that many teachers don't feel confident about leading peer learning so how do you feel about it? Are you able to ensure that everyone contributes equally and that you can hold the group accountable to the process?

It's much harder to facilitate as an *insider* than it is as an *outsider* so you need to use the strategies in this course to protect yourself from the fallout that inevitably occurs when change is mentioned. We'll go into this in greater detail in the next two modules but for now be aware that your role in the school (be it as teacher or teacher leader; in an endowed leadership position or not) will impact on you during discussion. You will, most likely, have a vested interest in the context and content of discussions that works in direct opposition to the role of facilitator. Therefore, be explicit to the group about what hat you're wearing and remain clear in your own mind about when you might change hats. If you want to contribute to the discussion about the work you and your peers do, put on your teacher or Assistant Principal hat, when you're wearing the facilitator hat your main objective is to keep the group accountable to the process and make it easy for them.

Here's how it might look in practice.

Jen, can you add anything to what Jack just said?

Thanks both of you, you have really got me thinking so I'd like to put my teacher hat on for a bit and add to the discussion. I can live with the change of time for PE, but I can't live with having all my DOTT on a Monday, that just isn't going to enable me to be effective in ...

OK, Everyone, I'm back as facilitator! Remember we agreed to speak one at a time so that everyone could be heard. Karen, let's hear from you now.

In Module 2 we'll go into how to facilitate in difficult situations but for now just be aware of the expectations that others might place on you in your role as facilitator and be as explicit and transparent as you can about what you're doing and why.

The Self-aware Facilitator

One of the greatest challenges we face as facilitators is what to do when someone expresses ideas or opinions that are strongly against our own beliefs. When put in this position one colleague said to me,

"I just get angry, not on the surface but underneath, I just want to tell them to get on with it!"

As facilitators we are called on to understand ourselves and the impact our actions and words have on others. Organisational change leader, Peter Senge, has this to say about self-awareness:

Self-awareness is a position of strength...Knowing one's strengths, personal vision and values, and where your personal "lines in the sand" are drawn will build a base of self-awareness that allows you to craft your career and have more good days than bad.

(Senge, 2000, p. 418)

Senge, suggests that reflection, as we mentioned earlier, and dialogue with your peers are necessary to develop self-awareness. Use the Circle Framework in your workbook **Exercise 10, p. 9** to evaluate where you are on your journey.

Continue now on your journey as a facilitator by building your base of self-awareness, trying out the strategies you have learnt in this module and seeking critical feedback as you go about your work. Module 2 will help you prepare your organisation to learn and build on your understanding of the role of facilitator in achieving success.

Appendix 1

Strategic Questioning

Asking questions that make a difference – create options, motion, dig deeper, empower

These questions are generic and can be adapted, combined and built on. You can use them to dig deeper into an issue, find out more about the way someone thinks or to hand a problem back to the group to solve. Try them in all kinds of contexts and note the impact. You can practice using the questions with your students first; to solve a problem or teach about a story or a maths concept. The possibilities are limitless!

Focus questions gather information that is already known.

General: Ok, so let's look at what we already know about this. What are the facts?

Specific: Ok, let's try and work out a way forward from where we are in the maths planning to where we want to be? What do we already know? What are the facts?

Observation questions use the senses.

General: What have you heard or seen? What conversations have already been held?

Specific: What are the key things you've said or heard in this meeting and what have you seen happen.

Analysis questions relate one thing to another.

General: Where have you seen something like this before?

Specific: Have you ever come across an idea like this before? Tell us about it? What was it like and why might we do it this way instead of the way we used to?

Feeling questions relate the situation to the physical impact on you.

General: How do you feel about the situation, character, problem?

Specific: How are you feeling right now about this work we're doing together, this problem of change, this meeting?

(It is important when you ask these questions that you do not take responsibility for the way people are feeling. Just give them the right to speak their truth into the silence. This is probably the toughest thing you have to do. A response to this question is not a reflection on you; it is simply a condition that exists and it gives you insight into what an individual might need. The following questions help you move forward.)

Visioning questions reveal the ideals, values and dreams

General: Why do you think the main character feels that way? What does he want and why?

Specific: What is making you feel that way about being in this group? How/what would you like it to be?

Considering all alternatives stops the group from getting stuck in one way of doing/seeing a situation.

General: Let's look at how we did that maths problem and see if there are other ways we could go about it.

Specific: Let's look at what we're doing in this group and see if we can look at other ways of reaching our vision. What could we change to make it better?

Personal action questions create a culture of accountability.

General: How could the main character get to where she wants to be? What can she contribute?

Specific: What do you have to offer to the group to help us get to be the best we can possibly be? What do you have to contribute and how would you like to do that?

Consider the consequences allow decisions to be clearer and recognise future impacts.

General: Ok, if we did that what would happen? Who would it impact?

Specific: Ok, if we decided to do that what might be the impact on the group, ourselves, the other groups?

Consider the obstacles recognises why we sometimes can't get started.

General: What is stopping us from lining up quietly in the mornings?

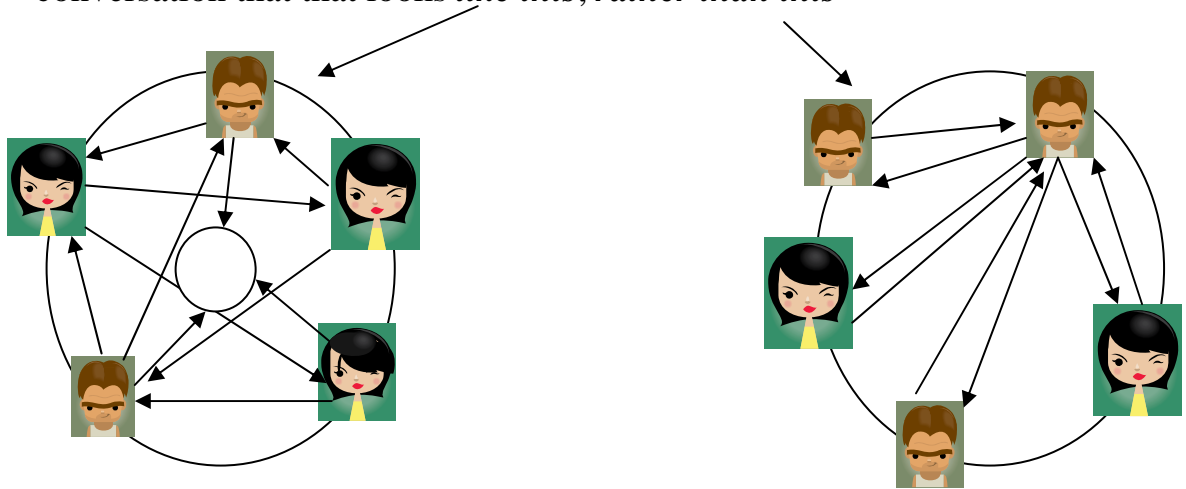
Specific: What is stopping us from being the very best we can be? Why can't we start right now?

Personal inventory and support questions reveal what each person needs to move ahead.

General: What do you need to do to make sure you line up each morning, quietly? How can we help you?

Specific: What do you need to do to make our group exceptional? How can we help you?

Play around with these questions; ask them in different orders and about different things. Find a way of asking them that feels comfortable to you. Bounce them from one person to another. Try to create a pattern of conversation that that looks *like this, rather than this*



SCHOOLS - MICROCOSMS OF SUSTAINABLE LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

